

# the Dark Eidolon

*The Journal of Smith Studies*



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Number Two

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#### **Editor's Note**

With this second issue of *The Dark Eidolon*, the Journal of Clark Ashton Smith Studies (formerly *Klarkash-Ton*), we join the family of publications under the imprint of Necronomicon Press. For this I am indebted to publisher Marc A. Michaud; and at the same time my thanks go to Dr. Robert M. Price (Cryptic Publications) for producing and distributing the Journal's first issue.

The primary goal of this Journal, that of encouraging the production of new critical essays on the life and literary work of Clark Ashton Smith, is gradually being achieved. As evidence of this, I would cite the fine contribution of Mike Ashley to this issue, especially. Our secondary function, the reprinting earlier pieces of Smith criticism, is fulfilled this time around by Charles K. Wolfe's admirable assessment of Smith's literary viewpoint, "CAS, A Note on the Aesthetics of Fantasy", which first appeared in the Smith tribute issue of Harry Morris' *Nyctalops* (Silver Scarab Press; Issue #8, 1972), and was later to be an influence on Wolfe's introduction to Smith's *Planets and Dimensions*. I am grateful to Professor Wolfe for his kind permission to reprint this substantial essay.

A very special thanks is due Gahan Wilson, for graciously producing his delightful cover illustration; additional thanks go to Rah Hoffman for supplying the photographs which accompany Francis T. Laney's memoir of their joint visit to Smith, to Robert H. Knox for *The Dark Eidolon* logo, and to Marc and Susan Michaud, Marie-Marthe Michaud, and S. T. Joshi for their help with preparing the texts.

Steve Behrends  
Aurora, IL  
12 June 1989

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## The Perils of Wonder

Clark Ashton Smith's Experiences with *Wonder Stories*

By Mike Ashley

Unique, as an absolute, is not a word that requires qualification, but for the benefit of emphasis I think it is fair to say that Clark Ashton Smith was probably the most unique contributor to *Wonder Stories* and quite possibly to any of the science fiction magazines of his day. Here was a poet with an evocative and pyrotechnic vocabulary capable of describing the most outré of ultra-terrene horrors but who found the type of science fiction published in the pulps to be generally unreadable, and found himself in a constant battle with the editors over his desire to explore the uncharted gulfs offered by science fiction, rather than their desire to plot a safer course related to extrapolative technology. "There are vast possibilities in the science fiction tale," he wrote to August Derleth, "but most of the work published under that classification is too trite and ill-written. From a literary standpoint, *Amazing Stories* and *Wonder Stories*, taking them tale by tale, compare very wretchedly indeed with W. T. [Weird Tales]."<sup>1</sup>

One might question, therefore, why Smith bothered to experiment with the SF tale at all. Yet during the short three years from 1930 to 1933 Smith had sixteen SF stories published in *Wonder Stories* and its companions, making him the most prolific contributor to Hugo Gernsback's magazines at that time, and his stories, after fifty years, remain some of the best and certainly most inventive that Gernsback published. But the relationship between Smith and Gernsback was not a happy one, and it led to a premature termination of Smith's SF experiments and possibly denied the world of other wonders that Smith might have explored, including a return to the City of the Singing Flame.

In this article I want to explore the relationship between Smith and Gernsback, in particular how Gernsback's editor, David Lasser, worked with Smith on a number of stories, and how editorial interference plus a massive backlog in payment finally soured the situation. The information comes primarily from letters made available by Brown University and the State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

Hugo Gernsback launched the first issue of *Science Wonder Stories* in May 1929 with the issue dated June. It was a large-size pulp modelled along the same lines as Gernsback's earlier *Amazing Stories*, the first science fiction magazine which he had launched in March 1926 (issue dated April) and which was aimed at popularising science through fiction. Smith did not think much of *Amazing Stories*, being "appalled by the increasing pedantry of its contents".<sup>2</sup> He had much the same opinion of *Science Wonder Stories* which he first encountered with its January 1930 issue. "I may try them with something presently," he wrote to Lovecraft. "I can see that if I am to make a real living out of fiction, I am in for a certain amount of quasi-hackwork."<sup>3</sup>

*Notes:* Quotations have come from the following sources. Letters provided by the State Historical Society of Wisconsin are identified by SHSW, and those by the Brown University Library, Providence, by BU. Letters from Smith to Lovecraft are quoted from *Letters to H. P. Lovecraft* edited by Steve Behrends (Necronomicon Press, 1987) and are identified as CAS and the letter number.

1. Smith to Derleth, May 15, 1932 [SHSW]

2. Smith to Lovecraft, November 26, 1929 [CAS #3]

3. Smith to Lovecraft, December 10, 1929 [CAS #4]

Evidently Smith, having made up his mind to become a full-time writer, was exploring potential markets. *Science Wonder Stories* seemingly appealed to him marginally more than *Amazing Stories*, possibly on the strength of a single story, "The Vapor Intelligence" by Jack Barnette. This short tale, which almost begs comparison with Lovecraft's "The Colour out of Space", tells of the arrival on Earth of a gaseous being that for the brief period of its survival haunts the Loon Marsh north of Ruberg somewhere in the southern States. The tale was sufficiently atmospheric to have made it a potential item for *Weird Tales*.

During January 1930 Smith started work on "Murder in the Fourth Dimension", a relatively mundane story. Gernsback had launched a new magazine with its January 1930 issue called *Scientific Detective Monthly*, subsequently retitled *Amazing Detective Tales*, and David Lasser, Gernsback's editor for his SF publications, purchased "Murder in the Fourth Dimension" for that magazine, where it appeared in the October 1930 issue. In the concurrent issue of the now retitled *Wonder Stories* appeared another Smith tale, "Marooned in Andromeda". Smith had started this story in January 1930 as well. He told Lovecraft: "I am beginning 'Marooned in Andromeda', which will be a wild tale about some mutineers on a space-flier who are put off without weapons or provisions on an alien world. The idea will form an excellent peg for a lot of fantasy, horror, grotesquery and satire."<sup>4</sup> Lasser was apparently enthusiastic in his acceptance of "Marooned in Andromeda". Smith told Lovecraft of their response: "... They want me to do a series of tales about the same crew of characters (Capt. Volmar, etc.) and their adventures on different planets, saying that they would use a novelette of this type every other month. I have asked them to name a rate of payment, and shall not submit anything more without a definite understanding."<sup>5</sup>

Lasser must have quoted a rate of payment, but I have found no correspondence at that time. Clearly Smith responded with an outline for a sequel, for Lasser responded to a letter from Smith dated September 5th 1930. "We are enclosing check for \$87.50 in payment for your story 'Marooned in Andromeda'. I hope that the enclosed check will help in your financial difficulties. The story that you have in mind sounds quite interesting and we would like to look it over. If we receive it within the next week we might be able to schedule it for the December issue. Will you kindly let us know at once when it will be completed."<sup>6</sup>

Since the story is around 12,000 words in length the payment represented a word-rate of only about 3/4¢ a word, certainly below the basic 1¢ a word of most pulps, but presumably acceptable to Smith since he had enquired about rates.

Just what story Smith had outlined to Lasser is not clear. He had already completed "The Red World of Polaris", which to this day remains unpublished, so it is unlikely to be that one. It was more probably "The Ocean-World of Alioth" which he mentioned in a letter to Lovecraft at this time but which he never completed.

Instead, on November 19th 1930, Lasser wrote again to Smith posing the idea of the adventures of a twentieth-century man in the future. Lasser offered to work the details out with Smith and help him to "whip a good plot in shape." He went on to say, "I believe that you have the ability to portray local color so that you could show not only the difference in the physical surroundings and the mode of life of our descendants, but also in their different habits of thought."<sup>7</sup>

Unless Lasser had read the half-dozen stories Smith had recently had published in *Weird Tales*, his view of Smith's abilities was based solely on the two stories he had so far purchased for Gernsback. In his blurb for "Marooned in Andromeda" Lasser had written: "... the author deserves special commendation due to his daring and far reaching vision in depicting conditions as they might exist on a distant planet in another universe."<sup>8</sup>

Clearly Lasser had perceived the boldness and depth of Smith's imagination. He had also seen but rejected "The Red World of Polaris" on the basis that the first part was too descriptive with insufficient action. It is evident that Lasser believed Smith needed some coaxing as an author to control his imaginative skills and work them into a readable and captivating story. Smith, in the meantime, was playing around with a number of plots without success and, prior to receiving Lasser's latest letter, had started a new Volmar story, "Captives of the Serpent", commenting to Lovecraft that "I'll give them their 'action' this time!!!"<sup>9</sup> Smith found the story difficult to progress though, and work was slow.

4. Smith to Lovecraft, January 27, 1930 [CAS #6]

5. Smith to Lovecraft, August 22, 1930 [CAS #11]

6. Lasser to Smith, September 10, 1930 [BU]

7. Lasser to Smith, November 19, 1930 [BU]

8. Lasser, introduction to "Marooned in Andromeda", *Wonder Stories* vol. 2, no. 5, October 1930, p. 391

9. Smith to Lovecraft, November 10, 1930 [CAS #16]

By one of those odd coincidences, Lovecraft had suggested a time-travelling notion to Smith, and with the arrival of Lasser's letter Smith worked out a synopsis [the idea supplied by Lovecraft was used by Smith in his projected novelette, "The Masters of Destruction", not in the story under discussion—Ed.]. Relating the news to Lovecraft, Smith added: "I cooked up a synopsis which was approved; and I am now going ahead with the junk as fast as my cold will permit."<sup>10</sup>

Lasser had offered some suggestions on Smith's outline. "I want to stress two things. The first is that the difference in the mentality, habit of thinking etc., of the people of the future and Hugh are very much different. Our writers of time traveling stories do not give their people of the future a reality because they do not emphasize the difference of those people to ourselves. I think also the story can be kept quite reasonable all through and that you have a fine chance to show lots of local color not only in the picturing of the future civilisation but also the strange character of the Venusians and the Martians."<sup>11</sup>

Lasser was quite rightly emphasising the need for human characterisation to be established against a background of local color. He had given much the same advice to Smith following receipt of the outline for "The Ocean-World of Alioth", when he suggested that the story be "A play of human motives, with alien world for a background." Smith hadn't seemed so keen on the proposal. "... If human motives are mainly what they want, why bother about going to other planets—where one might conceivably escape from the human equation? The idea of using the worlds of Alioth or Altair as a mere setting for the squabbles and heroics of the crew on a space ship ... is too rich for any use."<sup>12</sup>

Smith probably felt much the same about the need to bring human motivation and mentality into his time travel story, but he persevered. He finally finished it in early January, but in notifying Lovecraft of its completion he remarked: "Just now the time-story strikes me as an awful piece of junk."<sup>13</sup>

Junk or no, Lasser accepted the story and rapidly included it in the April 1931 *Wonder Stories* under the title "An Adventure in Futurity". In introducing the story he wrote:

The stories of Clark Ashton Smith ring with truth. He writes so well and so easily that the scenes that he tries to picture cannot help but be impressed on the minds of the readers.<sup>14</sup>

Already it would seem a division was forming. Smith was of the opinion that he was writing hack work, junk written to order, whilst Lasser was perceiving a talented and imaginative writer whom he was developing.

For relief from the rigors of science fiction, Smith turned to a horror story ("The Return of the Sorcerer") and then to a fantasy, which he called a "trans-dimensional story", "The City of the Singing Flame". The story was not an obvious contender for *Wonder Stories*, and Smith submitted it elsewhere, returning to the chore of finishing "A Captivity in Serpens", as the Captain Volmar story was now called. Completed in March, it was promptly accepted by Lasser:

We are accepting your story "A Captivity in Serpens" and will use it in an early issue of *WONDER STORIES* under the title of "The Amazing Planet". We were quite pleased with the story and believe it strikes the proper note for effective interplanetary atmosphere. We will be happy to receive more stories of the adventures of your explorers, showing their contact with other strange forms of life and other civilizations.<sup>15</sup>

So keen was Lasser to get the story into print that he shifted it to the next issue of *Wonder Stories Quarterly* (Summer 1931), even then being readied for the printer.

Lasser now received "The City of the Singing Flame". It is unfortunate that his letter of acceptance does not seem to have survived. But again he rushed it into print, though not so quickly that he could not find time to announce it as forthcoming in the June 1931 issue of *Wonder Stories*. "Clark Ashton Smith repeats his triumph of 'An Adventure Into Futurity' in his new story 'The City of Singing Flame'. Mr Smith's words burn and grip you. He carries

10. Smith to Lovecraft, December 1930 [CAS #18]

11. Lasser to Smith, November 29, 1930 [BU]

12. Smith to Lovecraft, November 16, 1930 [CAS #17]

13. Smith to Lovecraft, January 1931 [CAS #19]

14. Lasser, introduction to "An Adventure in Futurity", *Wonder Stories* vol. 2, no. 11, April 1931, p. 1232

15. Lasser to Smith, March 27, 1931 [BU]

you along to his strange world, where you feel as he did the overpowering lure of the flame. . . .<sup>16</sup> In introducing the story in the July issue Lasser further added: "Occasionally a master of words, possessed of a tremendous imagination, does give us a glimpse into other worlds. Poe did this and it brought him enduring fame. Clark Ashton Smith likewise does it, to the delight and wonder of our readers."<sup>17</sup> Lasser also called out for a sequel and it is reasonable to assume he had already suggested this to Smith in correspondence.

In the meantime, though, Lasser wrote to Smith on July 10th 1931 with a new proposal. Following a competition in *Wonder Stories Quarterly* for plots for interplanetary stories to be written up by leading authors, Lasser passed on to Smith the second prize outline, "The Martian" by E. M. Johnston of Collingwood, Ontario. Smith was required to knock the plot into a story of around 15,000 words and to submit it to Lasser by the end of July. Since Smith only received the letter on July 15th, it allowed him little more than a week in which to draft and type the story. "The plot," he wrote to Lovecraft, "was pretty good, so the job wasn't so disagreeable as it sounds."<sup>18</sup> The story was published in the Fall 1931 *Wonder Stories Quarterly* as "The Planet Entity".

Lasser now clearly regarded Smith as one of his accomplished stable of authors and the stories continued to come. "Beyond the Singing Flame" made the November 1931 *Wonder Stories*, "The Eternal World" the March 1932 issue, "The Invisible City" June 1932, "Flight into Super-Time" August 1932, and "The Immortals of Mercury" became volume 16 of *Science Fiction Series* of booklets Gernsback was issuing.

But all was not well. Writing to August Derleth, Smith commented: "I haven't had any news from editors, barring a check from Gernsback, who still owes for three tales."<sup>19</sup> Here was the first indication of an escalating problem. The States were, of course, in the grips of the Depression and Gernsback was rapidly becoming a victim. Lasser had explained the problem to Neil R. Jones in accepting his story "Space-Wrecked on Venus" and enclosing a check for \$50. "The reason for the delay in payment is that bank was closed in the early part of December and our funds were naturally tied up. We are getting straightened out, however, and can promise you more prompt payment on future stories."<sup>20</sup>

Smith was fortunate to receive his payment which, from evidence we shall shortly see, was probably for "The City of the Singing Flame". This means that the three stories for which payment was still outstanding were "The Planet Entity", "Beyond the Singing Flame" and "The Eternal World". It is rather ironic that "The Planet Entity" should be one of these, since in his letter of commission Lasser had made the point that "We are perfectly willing to pay you our usual rate for the completed story."<sup>21</sup> Moreover Gernsback, in announcing the competition, had also stated: "The author will receive his compensation for the writing of the story."<sup>22</sup>

As months passed nothing happened, but the requests for work continued. "The editor of *Wonder Stories* has asked me to do a novelette, and I shall begin it in a day or two. I wish they'd pungle up some more cash, but I suppose I'll have to extend some more credit, which seems to be the almost universal procedure these days."<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless Smith worked on the story, "The Dimension of Chance", based on an idea, one of random atoms, suggested by Lasser. The story was completed by late August, accepted within the week and published in the November 1932 *Wonder Stories*. Another short story, "The Master of the Asteroid", was also rushed into print a month earlier in the October issue. There was little doubt that Lasser was keen to get Smith's stories published the instant he received them. This might suggest that Lasser was receiving few publishable stories and that authors were now avoiding Gernsback's magazines, but the evidence does not suggest this. Despite the lack of payment for stories, authors were continuing to submit manuscripts, just like Smith. Moreover Lasser's prompt response and useful advice were far more agreeable than the total lack of response from editor T. O'Connor Sloane at *Amazing Stories*, who frequently held on to manuscripts for months before responding and then many months more before publication. By now *Asounding Stories* was suffering even more profoundly from the Depression, and publisher William Clayton had been forced to discontinue it. *Wonder* thus had the pick of the market, and it is evident that Lasser favoured Smith amongst his writers as someone of special talent and distinction. His blurbs betray his feelings:

16. Lasser, *Wonder Stories* vol. 3 no. 1, June 1931, p. 63

17. Lasser, introduction to "The City of Singing Flame", *Wonder Stories* vol. 3 no. 2, July 1931, p. 203

18. Smith to Lovecraft, August 1931 [CAS #22]

19. Smith to Derleth, April 16, 1932 [SHSW]

20. Lasser to Neil R. Jones, February 12, 1932 [copy letter provided by Jones]

21. Lasser to Smith, July 10, 1931 [BU]

22. Gernsback, "Interplanetary 'Plot' Contest", *Wonder Stories Quarterly* vol. 2, no. 3, Spring 1931, p. 293

23. Smith to Derleth, August 2, 1932 [SHSW]

In this story Mr. Smith reaches a new peak of achievement for his painting of the mysteries and strange possibilities of scientific events. We do not remember reading anything that approaches the vivid imagination of this story, or its bizarre series of adventures met by an explorer into the unknown.

"The Eternal World" *Wonder Stories* March 1932

Clark Ashton Smith is a past master in the art of showing to us forcibly our human limitations.

"The invisible City" *Wonder Stories* August 1932

Clark Ashton Smith refuses to be limited in his imagination by time and space.

"Flight into Super-Time" *Wonder Stories* August 1932

Clark Ashton Smith thus had a regular if currently non-paying market with a responsive and appreciative editor. Then trouble struck. Smith had submitted his story "The Eidolon of the Blind" to *Weird Tales* in August 1932 but it was rejected as being "too horrific". He then submitted it to *Astounding Stories* but it was returned as the magazine's future was in doubt. So he submitted it to *Wonder Stories*. "*Wonder Stories* has held 'The Dweller in the Gulf' (formerly 'The Eidolon of the Blind') for three weeks, which is likely to indicate acceptance, since they usually fire back anything they don't want almost by return mail," Smith wrote to Derleth.<sup>24</sup> However, he was to be disillusioned. "I was wrong in thinking 'The Eidolon of the Blind' had been definitely accepted by *Wonder*—the editor wants me to give the yarn more 'scientific motivation'. The horror element seems to be unexceptionable. I am, however, trying it once more on Wright, in the hope that it may find him in a semi-rational mood."<sup>25</sup> He didn't. Smith found it necessary to rework the story and resubmit it to *Wonder*. He also submitted "The Secret of the Cairn" [published as "The Light from Beyond"—Ed.] which was accepted without any trouble. Deliberation over "The Dweller in the Gulf", however, continued. Smith was not too concerned at not having heard from them. "The Gernsback outfit sometimes neglect to report at all, but this invariably means acceptance with them."<sup>26</sup>

So it came as a shock when Smith acquired the March 1933 *Wonder Stories*. In horror he wrote to August Derleth:

My triply unfortunate tale "The Dweller in the Gulf" is printed in the current *Wonder Stories* under the title of "Dweller in Martian Depths" and has been utterly ruined by a crude attempt on the part of someone—presumably the office boy—to rewrite the ending. Apart from this, paragraph after paragraph has been hewn bodily from the story. I have written to tell the editor what I thought of such Hunnish barbarity, and have also told him that I do not care to have my work printed at all unless it can appear verbatim or have the desired alterations made by my own hand. It shows what fine literature means to the Gernsback crew of hog-butchers.<sup>27</sup>

The resentment spilled over into a subsequent letter:

I am utterly disgusted with that outfit. Gernsback's present policy strikes me as being suicidal. Science fiction requires abundant descriptive matter to put it over at all—and most of the tales I have sent in recently have been objected to as containing a surplus of descriptive matter, adjectives, etc. Oh, hell . . . And the bastards owe me about six hundred dollars anyway. They might at least have the decency to print my stuff straight.<sup>28</sup>

According to Smith in a later letter Lasser apologised "profusely" for the changes that had been made, but it was too late to make amends. Smith learned that the changes to the story had been made at Gernsback's own express order. "Gernsback must be loco . . . I judge that the idiotic alterations have cooked the story pretty well with readers who might otherwise have admired it."<sup>29</sup> Smith wrote to Lovecraft on the same day and in the same mood. From that

24. Smith to Derleth, October 27, 1932 [SHSW]

25. Smith to Derleth, November 15, 1932 [SHSW]

26. Smith to Derleth, February 1, 1933 [SHSW]

27. Smith to Derleth, February 9, 1933 [SHSW]

28. Smith to Derleth, February 19, 1933 [SHSW]

29. Smith to Derleth, March 1, 1933 [SHSW]

letter, though, we also learn that "Lasser said he would try to get some action on my arrears from the accounting dept. But I fear that the whole outfit has developed a well-organised system of 'passing the buck'."<sup>30</sup>

Evidently Lasser hoped to smooth Smith's ire by getting some money to him. *Wonder Stories* had now published nine stories by Smith without a single payment. Two more had been accepted.

The incident over "The Dweller in the Gulf" was clearly the last straw. Smith had seemed content to submit manuscripts to Lasser with the prospect of immediate payment provided the stories were published without editorial meddling. Lasser, on the other hand, had perhaps become over-confident with his handling of Smith, thinking of him as one of his stable of authors. He clearly did not think that Smith would object to the editorial tampering and had underestimated, or possibly had not even considered, the consequences.

The backlog of payments was not unique to Gernsback. William Clayton's problems at *Strange Tales* and *Astounding* had caused delays, and payment for Smith's "The Second Interment", which had also appeared in October 1932, was not made until March 1933; but at least it had been forthcoming, and after a comparatively moderate five months. *Weird Tales* also owed Smith over \$200 and the prospect of immediate payment looked bleak. But though the payments would obviously have been considerably beneficial, they were clearly not critical. For at this same time, during the summer of 1933, Smith donated three stories to Charles Hornig's new amateur magazine, *The Fantasy Fan*, plus the promise of further articles. In fact not only did Smith donate stories, he even paid an advance subscription for the magazine!

But his treatment by Gernsback had been an insult. Not known for his anti-Semitism, Smith nevertheless became vituperative about Gernsback, along with the New York publisher Alfred Knopf [who had rejected a collection of Lovecraft's stories-Ed.]. "I wish Hitler had him, along with Gernsback,"<sup>31</sup> he remarked to Derleth.

In August 1933 David Lasser left Gernsback's employ, and the teenage Charles Hornig became the new editor at *Wonder Stories*. Although Hornig was using Smith's material in *The Fantasy Fan* he never considered asking Smith for any stories for *Wonder*, and Smith, although he clearly liked Hornig, gave no indication that he wished to submit anything further to Gernsback. Indeed, he was becoming even more indignant about the lack of payment. He broached the subject with Hornig who advised him to write direct to the accounts department. Nothing happened, but Hornig repeated the advice:

Did you get any result? Whether you did or not I advise you to write again. I know from experience that while we are paying much better now than before, the authors that are first served (those that have money owed from years ago) are those who write in requests frequently. Make it a bit vehement, though not threatening.<sup>32</sup>

But the accounts section was oblivious and Smith at last decided to take the action further. Several authors were now resorting to taking legal action. From Lovecraft he obtained the name of a female New York attorney, Ione Weber, who was one of several lawyers who had been successful in obtaining debts from Gernsback. On May 24, 1934 she confirmed she would be glad to undertake the collection of the debt and outlined in her letter the extent of the backlog according to Gernsback's accounts department:

The Planet Entity	\$118
Beyond the Slinging Flame	\$68
The Eternal World	\$60
The Invisible City	\$60
The Immortals of Mercury	\$80
Flight into Super-Time	\$95
Master of the Asteroid	\$40
The Dimension of Chance	\$65
Dweller In Martian Depths	\$50
The Light from Beyond	\$50
Visitors from Mlok	\$50
<i>Total</i>	<i>\$741</i>

30. Smith to Lovecraft, March 1, 1933 [CAS #32]

31. Smith to Derleth, October 19, 1933 [SHSW]

32. Hornig to Smith, March 10, 1934 [BU]



Gernsback had offered to pay the outstanding balance in instalments at stated intervals. Miss Weber's fee, if collection was made without suit, was to be 15% increasing to 25% upon suit and 50% upon proceedings. Moreover her fee, payable upon each instalment, had to be paid in advance. If the full \$741 was forthcoming without suit it would amount to \$111, virtually the whole cost of "The Planet Entity", which had been a solid week's work. Smith agreed to the terms and Miss Weber began to apply pressure.

Remarkably a payment of \$50 was made in July 1934 and a further \$50 followed in September. Gernsback now agreed to pay by monthly instalments of \$75, and the first \$75 was duly received in October. The payments continued, not always on a monthly basis, but at least they appeared. Ione Weber was herself somewhat surprised. Writing to Smith in March 1935 she commented: "As you can see, it is getting even more difficult to collect from Gernsback. However, you are the one that is being paid. I have not had a check for any other author for months and months."<sup>33</sup>

Just why Smith should be accorded this remarkable preferential treatment I am not sure. It is unlikely to have been Hornig's influence, since he had no influence with either of the Gernsbacks, or the accountants. Since Weber represented other authors who were not being paid it cannot have been specifically the pressure she was bringing to bear. It suggests that Gernsback must have felt he owed a debt to Smith, but it seems hard to believe Gernsback would have felt so guilty about the changes made to "The Dweller in the Gulf". Moreover, since Smith was no longer contributing to *Wonder*, Gernsback was not pandering to an existing author whom he might wish to have kept, such as David H. Keller, Edmond Hamilton, Jack Williamson or Laurence Manning. The only conclusion left is that Gernsback must have been hoping to tempt Smith back to *Wonder Stories*, and if this is the case then it suggests that not only Lasser but also Gernsback had a high opinion of Smith's work. Yet Smith was amongst the *least* scientific of Gernsback's authors, preferring to evoke vivid images more in the vogue of Abraham Merritt than of E. E. Smith. But perhaps that was the answer. Gernsback had lost many of his major writers of good scientific fiction to the newly relaunched *Astounding Stories*, and perhaps he saw the possibility of converting *Wonder Stories* into a more imaginative and less scientific magazine. During 1934 he had toyed with the idea of launching a weird fiction magazine but the concept never materialised. Perhaps the possibility remained in a change of direction at *Wonder*. If so, Smith would have been a leading light to attract to the magazine.

But Smith was not so easily won over. The payments continued and by May 1935 Smith was able to tell Derleth that only two instalments remained outstanding. I do not know whether these were paid, but there is little reason to doubt it. Shortly thereafter the cost of maintaining *Wonder Stories* became prohibitive and Gernsback sold the title to Ned Pines at Standard Magazines. Smith was not tempted into trying the new market, though he did eventually sell one further story, "The Great God Awto", which appeared in the February 1940 issue of the now retitled *Thrilling Wonder Stories*.

The *Wonder* episode was over. The moral is ironic. Smith entered the realms of science fiction because, in his desire to become a full-time writer, he realised he would have to produce a certain amount of hackwork, and he regarded SF as such. Nevertheless he also recognised the potential of science fiction for his hyper-imaginative mind. This did not fit into the concept of David Lasser who, whilst appreciating Smith's talents and vivid images, believed these should serve only to add color to plots involving human motivations and characterisations. Many of us might agree with Lasser had it been any writer other than Smith, but Smith was at heart a poet and words were the clay with which he modelled fantastic imagery and sinister sensations, not human desires and failings. Yet to Lasser and probably Gernsback he was one of the better writers of SF, but needed a degree of editorial remodelling to bring out the desired results. That was *Wonder's* failing, and ironically Smith's triumph. By sticking to his principles Smith found that he finally received all the money due to him from Gernsback and, in the meantime, channelled his remaining creative energies into his better imaginative fantasies for *Weird Tales*. As I said at the outset, Smith was certainly unique amongst SF writers of his day.

## CAS, A Note on the Aesthetics of Fantasy

By Charles K. Wolfe

Clark Ashton Smith was one of our foremost practitioners of fantasy, but he was also a writer very much aware of exactly what he was doing and why he was doing it. Unlike some of his contemporaries, who all too often saw themselves as entertainers rather than artists, Smith from the very beginning of his writing career saw himself as a serious artist, and saw his work as the realization of a cogent and well-formed aesthetic theory. This essay is an attempt to partially define that aesthetic, at least as it existed for Smith's fiction, and to relate it to the mainstream literary tradition.

During his lifetime Smith wrote well over thirty non-fictional essays of varying lengths. Unlike his friend, H. P. Lovecraft, Smith seldom wrote essays on topics of "general interest," such as cats or geographical locales; nearly every one of Smith's essays deals directly with literature or literary influences. Included among these essays are assessments of George Sterling, Lovecraft, M. R. James, Ambrose Bierce, Poe, Hodgson, and Donald Wandrei. But the most interesting essays are those in which Smith talks about his own art. Significantly, he never talks much about his poetry in these public essays (though he did frequently in his private letters); his attention is directed almost exclusively to his stories. A possible reason for this is that his short stories were much more public than his poetry; they were being exposed to all manner of reader in the pages of mass circulation magazines like *Wonder Stories* and *Amazing Stories*. With such a wide and occasionally hostile audience, Smith was more inclined to explain his intentions and defend his art.

Since over half of Smith's stories were written and published in the mid and early 1930s, it is not surprising that most of his important critical statements also date from that time. Especially interesting are a series of public debates Smith engaged in through the letter columns of *Wonder Stories*, *Amazing Stories*, *Strange Tales*, and *The Fantasy Fan* in 1932-33. Smith came under attack from those who were insisting upon more "realism" in science fiction; psychological realism was in vogue in mainstream literature in the 1930s (with Anderson, Dreiser, and Hemingway setting the pace) and various writers and fans of speculative fiction insisted that the only way by which speculative fiction would ever be accepted as "serious" literature would be for it to adopt more "realistic" modes. Smith perceived that realism was only one tradition, and that romanticism was an equally valid tradition. He rejected the definition that literature was a study of human reactions and character development; he called such a definition "narrow and limited." In the August, 1932 issue of *Wonder Stories*, Smith wrote:

To me, the best, if not the only function of imaginative writing, is to lead the human imagination outward, to take it into the vast external cosmos, and away from all that introversion and introspection, that morbidly exaggerated prying into one's own vitals—and the vitals of others—which Robinson Jeffers has so aptly symbolized as "incest." What we need is less "human interest," in the narrow sense of the term—not more. Physiological—and even psychological analysis—can be largely left to the writers of scientific monographs on such themes.

Smith saw the folly of people who equated "realism" with quality in literature; only in the last decade has literature begun to recover from the tyranny of the realism criterion, the assumption that the only function of literature is

to tell it "how it is." Smith fought his lonely battle during the height of the realistic movement, in the 1930s; only today is the literary mainstream beginning to appreciate the fact that some writers are not *trying* to be "realistic," and that reading them requires a different set of standards. Oddly enough, Smith today is quite at home in a contemporary literature in which the most respected writers are neo-romantics like Barth, Borges, Vonnegut, and Hawkes. (The only concession to "realism" Smith made was in regard to writing ability as opposed to intention; he repeatedly insisted on the all-important distinction between realism as a literary school and simple writing ability; he suggests that much of the criticism of speculative fiction launched in the 1930s would be eliminated if writers would simply write better, not in a different mode.)

But to simply say Smith is a "romantic" is hardly enough; the term is hopelessly broad and inclusive, and means a dozen different things. In what specific ways is Smith romantic and not romantic, and according to what standards? We must deal with these questions before we can really come to terms with what Smith was doing in his fiction.

Of course, no one can deny that Smith's prose style is romantic by any definition of the word; the texture, color, sentence structure, and, especially, the vocabulary is in the best tradition of the self-conscious story-teller, always reminding us that we are in the hands of an artist, and what we are reading is indeed art, and reminding us of the difference between the world of art and the everyday world. The recent textual work of Lin Carter and others is showing us just how rich Smith's prose style was; it was richer even than we had imagined, for the editors of the time apparently were quite ruthless in editing his stories. One could, indeed, make a good argument for style being the most important aspect of Smith's art, and that his style is frequently an end in itself. But for the sake of argument, let us artificially divide style from content, and look at some of the structural patterns in Smith's stories: how are they romantic?

If any basic structural pattern emerges from Smith's various stories, it is one of the journey by the hero into some other world, some sort of magic world; it may be via a space voyage, via dimension, via the past, or a mystic experience. But frequently Smith's heroes must make this journey; they must cross the threshold into some sort of *alternative reality*. (This term seems better than the term "fantasy world," since "fantasy world" implies an unfair distinction; it implies that the "real" world—the common, recognizable world—is more basic or more important than the other world; Smith would have insisted that both worlds were equally important, were equally "real.") Stories of this sort are multifold; the titles of two Smith collections, *Lost Worlds* and *Other Dimensions*, testify to the pervasiveness of this theme in his work. Perhaps the most centrally significant of these threshold stories is "The City of the Singing Flame," which suggests multiple alternative realities.

In many stories Smith goes out of his way to stress the significance of this threshold; he does this by creating in his readers a feeling of incredible *remoteness* from these alternate realities. A reader is hardly impressed by a threshold to a world very much like his own; thus a successful fantasy, like *Alice in Wonderland*, will strive to make the alternative reality as different as possible from the "control," everyday reality. Smith was fond of manipulating his readers by attempting, through various devices, to "distance" the events of his story from the reader's world. For example, "The End of the Story" is presented through the manuscript of a law student found sometime after 1789; the real plot of the story thus is distanced from us, first, by the fact that it is second-hand, coming in a manuscript, and second, by the fact that the manuscript is removed from us by history. In "The Testament of Athammas," we have the obviously ancient narrative of a chief headman in Commorion, who then tells the story of his youth of how Commorion fell; again, we have two stages of distancing. The story of Commorion has already become a misty legend to the narrator; and yet the narrator is already remote to us because he is from Hyperborea; the actual story of Commorion is thus infinitely more remote to us. But Smith did not need to rely on the past in creating a sense of remoteness; he just as easily used space travel and the future. For instance, "The Dweller in the Gulf" contains no less than four "distancing" elements: 1) the Martian setting; 2) the time setting (obviously the future); 3) the antiquity of the cavern into which the party wanders and the antiquity of the Martian surface; and 4) the bizarre descent into the sub-world of Mars. In short, we have an alternative reality within an alternative reality, *et al.*, like a series of Chinese boxes, one within the other. Of course, these distancing devices have been used since the time of Irving and Hawthorne to try to lend an aura of antiquity to relatively recent and commonplace events; but Smith's Imagination allowed him to develop this art of distancing to striking perfection. And when it works, his readers are made acutely aware of the alien quality of Smith's other worlds. This is perhaps what Smith meant when he said the function of imaginative literature was to lead the imagination *outward*. (Smith admitted in a 1940 essay, "Planets and Dimensions," published in *Tales of Wonder*, No. 11, that among his science fiction tales, "the majority have dealt either with worlds remote in space or worlds hidden from human perception. . . ." This would seem to indicate that Smith used his science fiction stories to illustrate the same basic themes as he developed in his stories of antiquity.)

But what happens to characters who encounter these remote alternative realities? And what is the nature of these realities: are they hostile, beneficent, or what? These complicated questions need longer answers than we can

provide here, but one or two points are obvious. We might first note that Smith's basic plot—the hero crossing the threshold into an alternative reality—is closely related to the classic hero myth as traced throughout the ages from primitive myth to folk legend to literature. Joseph Campbell, in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, has defined this basic structural pattern or monomyth, as follows: "A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of *supernatural wonder* (Italics mine): fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man." Now the first part of this structure fits the stories of Smith well; the hero does go, frequently, from a recognizable world into a world of wonder: the past, a remote planet, another dimension, or even occasionally a dream. But here the pattern breaks down, for in many of Smith's stories, the heroes do not return from their alternative realities. Some of them strive to return, but fail; witness stories like "The Dweller in the Gulf," "The Weird of Avooos! Wuthoquuan," "The Weaver in the Vault," "The Second Internment," or "Master of the Asteroid." Others, like Giles Angarth in "City of the Singing Flame," make it back but are shattered by the experience. A few, like the law student in "End of the Story," prefer to stay in the alternative reality; the speaker in the poem "Amithaine" says, "who has seen the towers of Amithaine/Shall sleep, and dream of them again" and, in the end, chooses to remain in the romantic dream world, the "fallen kingdoms of romance."

Now exactly how romantic is this pattern? On one level, readers of extremely popular writers like Burroughs expect and receive their heroes' return from the alternative reality to the "natural" world; here Smith is writing a different sort of fiction, to be sure. But on a literary level, even with a more abstract definition of romance, it would seem Smith is writing something different. One of the keystones of romanticism as a philosophy is the ability of man to triumph over his environment; Smith's characters seem defeated by their environments, even though the environments are alternative environments created by Smith. In one respect, there's not much difference between Stephen Crane's Maggie being crushed by social and economic forces—a hostile environment—and Smith's heroes being destroyed by the Dweller in the Gulf; in both cases, attempts of the heroes to assert themselves and to escape are futile. (The editors of *Wonder Stories*, incidentally, found the ending of "Dweller" so bitter that they changed it; Smith wrote to a friend, "In the tale as I submitted it, no escape was possible for any of the three earth-men, since the Dweller was filling the *whole* of the narrow path ahead of them. Bellman met the same fate as the others. . . . The tale is hopelessly ruined . . . , and I am writing a letter of protest to the editor.") Nor is this pessimism simply apparent in Smith's fiction: he often seems quite naturalistic in certain aspects of his critical statements. In a letter he published in *Amazing Stories*, October, 1932, Smith protested the view that saw man as the center of the universe; the real thrill of properly done fantastic fiction, he said, "comes from the description of the *ultrahuman* events, forces and scenes, which properly dwarf the terrene actors to comparative insignificance." Fantasy should emphasize the non-human or extra-human; "Isn't it only the damnable, preposterous and pernicious egomania of the race" that insists on realistic fiction? In "The Tale of Macrocosmic Horror," in *Strange Tales*, January, 1933, Smith said that in the "tale of highest imaginative horror," "the real actors are the terrible arcanic forces, the esoteric cosmic malignities. . . ." Thus most of Smith's characters are hopeless pawns in the face of some alternative reality; they seldom assert themselves, and all too often pay the ultimate price for crossing the threshold.

In this respect, then, we can hardly call Smith a romantic. This side of Smith certainly has affinities with someone like Ambrose Bierce (who was a major influence on Smith, though Smith made perfectly clear in private letters [especially one to R. H. Barlow, September 19, 1933] that he never met Bierce), or Kurt Vonnegut, whose notion of human civilization in *Sirens of Titan* would surely have appealed to Smith. The point is that, like most serious writers, Clark Ashton Smith was too complex to be pigeon-holed by a single term. He was uniquely himself, and, for me at least, his appeal lies in this uniqueness. But I hope this discussion has shown us that "fantasy" and "romance" are not necessarily synonymous terms, that Smith knew this, articulated it, and illustrated it in his fiction.

Clark Ashton Smith:

## Cosmicist or Misanthrope?

By Steve Behrends

In his Foreword to Clark Ashton Smith's literary notebook, *The Black Book*,<sup>1</sup> Marvin R. Heimstra uses the word "cosmic" six times in the course of three brief paragraphs, to describe Smith's literary inclinations and philosophical point of view. Mr. Heimstra is not alone in his choice of words: over the years, many critics and reviewers have labeled either Smith or his artistry with exactly this term. It may be, though, that we have an instance here of something more "said" than "true". Could it be that the critics have consistently misheard Smith's voice? In Clark Ashton Smith's writings, is it cosmicism or misanthropy that speaks the loudest?

First, what do we mean by a "cosmic" story (or poem or play)? By even posing this question we tend to be playing H. P. Lovecraft's game: he popularized the term, and in so doing put his finger on the most powerful and distinctive quality of his own work. Taking the lead from Lovecraft, I would say that such works are associated with concepts vast and vastly mysterious, and with the use of startling, unearthly imagery;<sup>2</sup> they partake of a distant perspective, and above all are pervaded with an *indifference* toward human affairs, thus provoking a sense of our littleness and transience. We must be quick to point out that cosmicism can not be simply equated with the qualities of fiction on the grand scale (an association that would have us make bedfellows of Lovecraft's "Call of Cthulhu" and Doc Smith's *Planet-Breaker*): a cosmic work need not be vast in scale, but can instead be vast in its implications, by invoking gulfs lying unsuspected beyond daily life. A list of writers who have chosen to work from time to time in this arena would include Olaf Stapledon, William Hope Hodgson, Donald Wandrei, Lovecraft, T. E. D. Klein. Lovecraft himself would add Machen and Blackwood to the list, and exclude Lord Dunsany.

In the above description of the qualities that seem to characterize cosmicism, the words "unsuspected" and "mysterious" are telling. Both point to the same thing—to mankind's essential ignorance of the true nature of things. The cosmos is mysterious because mankind is ignorant; mankind is ignorant because mankind is small. But for what is to follow, it is extremely important to understand that *this does not constitute a judgment against humanity, but rather a realization of the immensity, the inhumanity of the cosmos*; as we would expect, the focus of the statement is not on mankind but on the impersonal universe.

And this brings us to Clark Ashton Smith because, for all that he was many things, he was never an indifferent watcher of humanity. Smith's attitude was in fact quite hostile toward humanity as a whole, and herein lies one of two focal points for an understanding of his alleged "cosmicism". Into Smith's hostility, many have read indifference; and this, together with his Romantic penchant for describing events at the grand scale—and there is no grander scale than the astronomical—has led Smith's readers to proclaim his distant, "cosmic" viewpoint. (It is worth mentioning in passing that, for some readers, Smith has probably been carried into the "cosmic" category on the coat-tails of his

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1. *The Black Book of Clark Ashton Smith* (Saug City WI: Arkham House, 1979).

2. Dreams provide this sort of imagery for some writers, Lovecraft and Donald Wandrei being two examples.

much more popular friend, Lovecraft.) Below, I discuss individually these two tendencies, towards misanthropy and Romanticism, that taken together give Smith the appearance of an author who writes from a distant perspective.

The temperamental gulf separating the poet Smith from his Auburn neighbors was immense. As one critic has noted, Smith's delicate verse, or his translations from the French of Baudelaire, were likely to find themselves in *The Auburn Journal* "on the same page as an ad for Cohen's July clearance of muslin undergarments";<sup>3</sup> one of his stories groups poets of Romantic inclinations together with "double-headed snakes [and] five-legged calves".<sup>4</sup> Smith's sense of isolation bred hostility, and his early letters to George Sterling literally bristle with hatred for his more mundane fellows. With time, the scope of his disdain widened, and at one point he called human beings "the stupidest, greediest and most cruel of the fauna on this particular planet"<sup>5</sup> (no distant judgment, this!). Smith himself recognized the core of misanthropy (the recent reminiscences of a friend<sup>6</sup> reveal that Smith avoided all restaurants save empty ones) that gave rise to his hostile attitude and his "personal disenchantment with the social world": in a reflective letter to Lovecraft, he likened himself poignantly to Randolph Carter, a character in Lovecraft's "The Silver Key" who seeks to abandon the present-day world to regain his pleasant childhood. "With me, though," he said, "there is no conscious desire to go back in time—only a wild aspiration toward the unknown, the uncharted, the exotic. . . ." <sup>7</sup> It was through fiction-writing and versifying that Smith sought his refuge, his "escape from the human aquarium".<sup>8</sup>

In Smith's short stories, the fictional worlds we encounter are often more anti-human than non-human (the distinction is epitomized by "Marooned in Andromeda",<sup>10</sup> when a voyager to an alien planet is swallowed by a carnivorous plant and is promptly spat out as unpalatable). He portrayed humanity less as an inconsequential bacterium against the immense backdrop of the universe, than as a pestilential virus. His story synopses provide the most succinct statements of intent, and here we see his acerbic and hostile point of view in their undiluted forms. A classic example is "Masters of the Dark Mountain",<sup>11</sup> in which terrestrial voyagers to Pluto are tested by "highly evolved beings . . . with a view to learning whether any relationship with terrestrials is desirable. Following the test, the Masters decide in the negative". In "The Forgotten Beast",<sup>12</sup> the last man on Earth is "regarded with aesthetic horror" by Earth's inheritors; and similarly treated are the colonists in "The After-Men",<sup>13</sup> who return to the Earth after ages have passed and find themselves "regarded with horror, treated as monsters" by the sophisticated creatures that now dominate the planet. In "The Destination of Gideon Balchoth"<sup>14</sup> a London businessman is abducted by aliens and whisked to their home world, to serve "as ocular proof that anything so unnatural and bizarre as humanity could exist". And in the completed story "The Seven Geases",<sup>15</sup> the pompous and bellicose Ralibar Voov, toward whom Smith is hostile as an individual, is told by a member of an advanced race of serpent-scientists that our species represents "a very uncouth and aberrant life-form". Clearly, Smith's misanthropy extended into his literary output.<sup>16</sup>

The second ingredient contributing to the perception of cosmicism in Smith's work is the epic and astronomical scale of many of his productions, both in poetry and prose. The astronomical universe was a place of grandiose beauty and powerful drama for Clark Ashton Smith, and he felt drawn to write of it: "To my imagination, [nothing] seems half so portentous as the going-out of a sun. I admit that I have been, and still am, obsessed by

3. Hal Rubin, "Clark Ashton Smith—III-Fated Master of Fantasy" in *Sierra Heritage*, June 1985.

4. *The Monster of the Prophecy* (West Warwick RI: Necronomicon Press, 1988).

5. Letter to Robert H. Barlow, 16 May 1937; reprinted in *Klarkash-Ton: The Journal Of Smith Studies* #1 (Cryptic Publications, 1988).

6. Robert B. Elder, interviewed by Henry Vester in *Fungi* #6 (Summer 1985).

7. Letter to H. P. Lovecraft, ca. 24 October 1930 (Letter #15 in *Clark Ashton Smith: Letters to H. P. Lovecraft* [West Warwick RI: Necronomicon Press, 1987]).

8. *Ibid.*

9. Letter to Lovecraft, ca. 27 January 1931 (letter #20 in *Letters to H. P. Lovecraft*).

10. *Other Dimensions* (Seuk City WI: Arkhem House, 1970).

11. *The Black Book*, item 16.

12. *The Black Book*, item 8.

13. *Strange Shadows: The Uncollected Fiction and Essays of Clark Ashton Smith* (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1989).

14. *Ibid.*

15. *Lost Worlds* (Saug City WI: Arkhem House, 1944).

16. In fairness to Smith, we should exercise some caution before treating some of his fictions as representing a misanthropic, anti-human world-view, for it is probably true to some extent that they also reflect a reaction against the narrow-minded humanism of the yarns being published at the time in, say, *Wonder Stories*. But I feel that enough examples could be taken from his fiction, poetry, and correspondence (both published and unpublished) to confirm beyond question his innate hostility towards humanity.

visions of stupendous dooms".<sup>17</sup> When we read his poetic sagas of the sun, the wandering stars, comets, the abyss, it's natural for us to conclude that Smith's perspective is a cosmic one. But with closer scrutiny, we see that the approach Smith took with his versifying was classical and Romantic: forces and objects are personified, comets sing "songs" of their travels, etc. This sort of sentimentality is entirely at odds with a truly detached, cosmic outlook.

I must admit that I do find it difficult to reconcile the above arguments against cosmicism in Smith with his own statements about his viewpoint. He did, after all, pen the following: "Science, philosophy, psychology, humanism, after all, are only candle-flares in the face of the eternal night with its infinite reserves of strangeness, terror, sublimity".<sup>18</sup> This could serve as the very motto and creed of cosmicism. And in a letter from 1930 he lamented that "there are not many people with a sense of the cosmic strangeness and mystery".<sup>19</sup> But these statements notwithstanding, the bottom line is that Smith rarely endowed his productions with a sense of the cosmic. Even in a story like the aborted "Vizaphmal in Ophiuchus",<sup>20</sup> a story he looked forward to writing because it would "not bring in any human characters at all",<sup>21</sup> the characters and events Smith envisioned for it were all tediously mundane and "human".<sup>22</sup> I cannot account for this general discrepancy between intent and result; perhaps Smith found the technical difficulties of maintaining reader identification and interest in the "cosmic" brand of story too daunting. Or perhaps Smith's definition of "cosmic" simply does not coincide with my own.

But now let me step back and in essence retract some of what I have said. While I do feel that the bulk of Smith's alleged cosmicism is a misinterpretation, he was capable on occasion of writing from a cosmic viewpoint unsoiled by derision and hostility. I find hints of the intrusion of the truly cosmic in several of Smith's productions: the mysterious classic "City of the Singing Flame" and the similar "Secret of the Cairn" (published as "The Light from Beyond"—though in both we find the taint of an unwanted classicism, viz. the "Siren" motif of the first and the "Tree of Life" imagery of the second), "Master of the Asteroid", the concluding paragraph of "The Beast of Averroigne". Perhaps others; at this point, of course, we are dealing with fine and subjective distinctions.

To summarize my own overall belief: what we have come to think of as cosmicism in Clark Ashton Smith is in fact something else, something that arose from the combined influences of two aspects of Smith's personality, the Romantic and the misanthrope. They together manage to give the appearance of a cosmic perspective in much of his fiction and poetry, but it is an appearance only. In short, for the true cosmicist Lovecraft, there was the immensity of the physical universe, while for Clark Ashton Smith, only the sense of distance and isolation from his fellow men.

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17. Letter to George Sterling, 11 September 1912.

18. Letter to Lovecraft, ca. early October 1930 (Letter #13 in *Letters to H. P. Lovecraft*).

19. Letter to Lovecraft, ca. 24 October 1930 (Letter #15 in *Letters to H. P. Lovecraft*).

20. *Strange Shadows*.

21. Letter to Lovecraft, 16 November 1930 (Letter #17 in *Letters to H. P. Lovecraft*).

22. The same failing is demonstrated by the various gods and demons that Smith created for his fictions; all, regrettably, are "human" in their behavior and inclinations.

## The Reader Speaks:

Reaction to Clark Ashton Smith in the Pulp

By T. G. Cockcroft

Not every reader of *Wonder Stories*, it seems, was impressed by C. A. Smith's contributions. This paragraph is found in a letter, bearing the names of C. Ferry and B. Rogers, of Frankford, Michigan, published in the December 1933 issue:

Please, dear editor, will you kindly enlighten our abysmal ignorance, as to the brand of dope Clark Ashton Smith uses? "The Eternal World" is certainly an excellent revelation of a hashish guzzler's mental processes—of all the imbecilic drivel!!! His manipulation of superfluous verblage, while qualifying him perfectly for a position as secretary of an insane asylum, certainly has no place in a magazine of scientific fiction. Understand, we're not crabbing about the use of apt or colourful expressions when they serve to strengthen and clarify description—it's those wise birds who think they can string a lot of weird, onomatopoeic adjectives and hackneyed phrases together, and dish out the resultant drivel as pure science, that get us.

They weren't to be troubled by further tales by Smith until the April 1938 issue; and by then, of course, the magazine was no longer published and edited by Hugo Gernsback. The reasons for Smith ceasing to appear as a fiction-writer in *Wonder* have been given elsewhere. However, in the April 1934 issue the formation was announced of the Science Fiction League; in the following issue, May, a list was given of the Executive Directors, and in this list of names is that of Clark Ashton Smith. (The others are Forrest J. Ackerman, Eando Binder, Jack Darrow, Edmond Hamilton, David H. Keller, M. D., P. Schuyler Miller, and R. F. Starzl.) The list remained the same until and including the last Gernsback issue, April 1936. The list published in the August 1936 issue, the first from the new publisher, retains the first four names, but the others are gone, displaced by Arthur J. Burks, Ray Cummings and Ralph Milne Farley—there being now only seven directors. (Reasons not known to the present writer!)

In some 1934 issues Smith used the Science Fiction Swap Column to advertise, at 25¢ per copy, his booklet of tales, *The Double Shadow and Other Fantasies*; and in at least two 1935 issues he offered *Ebony and Crystal* as well, mendaciously describing it as "a book of 114 prose-poems" (the majority of the poems in this volume, of course, are verse; but it was truly a bargain at \$1.00 postpaid). Charles Hornig was the managing editor of *Wonder Stories*; his amateur journal *The Fantasy Fan* had been supported by Smith with contributions of fiction; Hornig may have had something to do with Smith's appointment as a League director, and he may have been able to reduce the price to Smith for those advertisements in the Swap Column.

In January 1935 the League presented the first Science Fiction Test. Later in the year some of the brief essays that were evoked by some of the questions were published; in the June issue we find this:

Part Six, Section One ("My Favorite Science Fiction Author") by G. L. Bedford, Jr.:

"My favorite science fiction author is without a doubt Clark Ashton Smith. Although of late he has been writing weird stories and the fact that he has written more weird stories than he has science-fiction does not deter me from saying that he is one of the best science-fiction authors alive today. He told me that he liked to write weird stories better, so you can see that if he ever devoted his entire energy to the writing of science-fiction stories he would be far ahead of the so-called leaders of



science-fiction today. Clark Ashton Smith has a wonderful vocabulary and knows how to use it. It is always worth the price of the magazine to read one of his rich, fascinating stories."

Supposedly Smith read this, and was pleased by it.

In the January 1935 issue a reader asked, in a letter published in "The Reader Speaks", "would you please list ten or so of the *best* stories . . . you have ever published as I would like to purchase them." Managing editor Hornig gave a list of "ten of the most popular stories we have printed, according to the opinions of our readers"—by which he doubtless meant the opinions of those readers who'd bothered to supply them. Smith's "The City of Singing Flame" is seventh on this list (its sequel is not mentioned); the others are

1. "The Human Termites" by David H. Keller
2. "The City of the Living Dead" by Manning and Pratt
3. "The Exile of the Skies" by Richard Vaughan
4. "The Brood of Helios" by John Bertin
5. "The Time Stream" by John Taine
6. "The Hidden World" by Edmond Hamilton
8. "Exiles of the Moon" by Zagat and Schachner
9. "Into Plutonian Depths" by Stanton A. Coblentz
10. "Utopia Island" by Otfried von Hanstein

Not an inspiring list today! A modern reader perhaps could get some enjoyment from nos 2 and 8; but only Smith's story seems to have many admirers still. Why "A Martian Odyssey" by Stanley G. Weinbaum isn't in this list is a mystery—Hornig has been quoted as saying that this was quite the most popular story ever published in the *Gernsback Wonder*. Perhaps it had appeared too recently.

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Farnsworth Wright starts off the *Eyrie* in *Weird Tales* for July 1930 with these words:

The May issue of *Weird Tales* has found unusual favor with you, the readers. The story that you liked best, as shown by your votes, was "The End of the Story", by Clark Ashton Smith.

This story is mentioned in three of the letters published in that issue. Mrs. M. Kliman, of Detroit, says that "The End of the Story" is easily the best tale in the May number—a splendidly written and interest-holding story."

"I think your magazine one of the few outposts of the human imagination still left in the age of stale realism," writes Benjamin De Casseres, of New York City. "I enjoyed particularly in the May issue 'The End of the Story', by Clark Ashton Smith, which is not only a philosophic thriller but possesses real literary quality, which is not lost (on the contrary) on readers, such as you have, of imaginative tales."<sup>1</sup>

"I want to thank you," writes Carl Wilhelmson, of Phoenix, Arizona, "for the enjoyment I had in reading that superior and fascinating tale, 'The End of the Story', by Clark Ashton Smith, in your May issue; and to express my admiration for your taste, since from a prolonged perusal of American magazines I am under the impression that in the publications pretending to culture and sophistication one would look in vain for the writings of anyone of the caliber of Mr. Smith—a true poet."

The following are the first three paragraphs of "The Eyrie" in the September 1930 issue (by now "The Last Incantation" and "Sadastor" had appeared, in the June and July issues respectively):

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1. Benjamin De Casseres was born twenty years earlier than Smith, and died in 1945. *The Reader's Encyclopedia of American Literature* describes him as "newspaperman, drama critic, poet, biographer" and says that his style "tended . . . toward the hifalutin. . . ." He was a friend of H. L. Mencken.

The stories of Clark Ashton Smith have aroused tremendous enthusiasm in our readers. Mr. Smith, whose poetry has been one of the brightest features of *Weird Tales*,<sup>2</sup> is now hailed by many as a new find in the fiction world because of the high literary quality and compelling fantasy of his short tales in this magazine.<sup>3</sup>

V. P. Miner, of Sacramento, California, writes to the "Eyrle": "Just a note of appreciation, nothing more; a man and his work—no matter how great his tasks—must occasionally be compelled to pause now and then and listen for echoes. Lately I have come upon a story now and then by Clark Ashton Smith. I believe you have recognized an artist and put him to work. His stories have care; there are beauty and art in every line. His imagination is distinct; the mystery of his background is amazing. And within it all there exists a philosophy. I believe you have reached out among the thousands of present-day writers and placed your hands on a real 'find'. I desire to express the kind sentiments of this household for the rich hours of entertainment that the stories in *Weird Tales* have given us."

A letter from Frank L. Pollock, of Shedden, Ontario, says: "In looking over a copy of your magazine I came upon quite an extraordinary story called 'The Last Incantation', by Clark Ashton Smith. I have reread it several times, and can not refrain from writing you to remark upon its very unusual literary quality. It has, in fact, the very quality of Poe at his best—with perhaps a touch of Lord Dunsany."<sup>4</sup>

And in the October issue, we find the following:

Mrs. William Haas, of Alexandria, Indiana, writes: "I have just read in your June issue a story by Clark Ashton Smith. The man's imagination and technique are worthy of the highest commendation and I shall look forward to more stories by this remarkable writer. He has a different tone, a different style, and a different story."

Alice L'Anson writes from Mexico City: "I have been reading with considerable interest the last batch of letters in your July *Weird Tales*. Let me add to the other encomiums my own praise for Clark Ashton Smith's tale, 'The End of the Story.' My favorite reading of the weird type is that dealing with haunted castles, mediæval ruins, and such-like things, with a thread of poetic fantasy running through them."

2. There may have been something of a "flurry" among *Weird Tales*' readers at the end of 1927, when Smith's poem "The Saturnienne" appeared in the December issue; this is what we are told about it in the February 1928 issue:

Clark Ashton Smith's unusual poem, "The Saturnienne", has made a real hit with you, the readers, judging by the enthusiastic comment it has evoked.

"'The Saturnienne' is a masterpiece of its kind," writes Charles M. Welker, of Federalsburg, Maryland. "This poem is grotesque and unique, to say the least, and I would like to read more of this man's work."

"I read Clark Ashton Smith's bit of verse with delight," writes August W. Derleth, of Madison, Wisconsin. "I hope you run more of his poetry."

3. Smith's first ten stories in the magazine *Weird Tales*:

The Ninth Skeleton	September 1928
The End of the Story	May 1930
The Last Incantation	June 1930
Sadastor	July 1930
The Phantoms of the Fire	September 1930
The Uncharted Isle	November 1930
The Necromantic Tale	January 1931
A Rendezvous in Averroigne	April-May 1931
The Venus of Azombei	June-July 1931
A Voyage to Stanomoe	August 1931

4. Frank Lillie Pollock seems to be remembered today only for being the author of a short story called "Finis", first published in the June 1906 issue of *The Argosy*, and reprinted in *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*, May-June 1940 and *Fantastic Novels*, July 1948; in *Magazine of Horror*, August 1963 as "The Last Dawn"; and in Moskowitz's anthology *Science Fiction by Gaslight*, 1968.

And in the January 1931 issue, there's a letter from the lady to whom Smith would dedicate his collection of tales, *Out of Space and Time*, ten years later:

"I would like to express my admiration for 'The Uncharted Isle' in the November issue," writes Genevieve K. Sully, of Auburn, California. "Clark Ashton Smith's work always has literary distinction, and when that quality is coupled with superb weird imagination, one finds a story well worth reading. May I express a belated word of praise for Frank Belknap Long's story in the September number, 'The Man from Egypt'? [The title is really 'A Visitor from Egypt'.] Mr. Long's writing denotes an acquaintance with the finer things, and I for one should be glad to read more from one with his scholarly attitude of mind. Both of these writers whom I have mentioned have nothing of the commonplace about their work, and you are to be congratulated upon your good taste in including their stories in your magazine."<sup>5</sup>

In the June-July 1931 issue, Alice l'Anson makes her second and last appearance in "The Eyrie" with this brief note:

As was to be expected, my favorite story in the April-May issue is "A Rendezvous in Averogne". It is a gem of fantasy, beautifully worded, dreamily weird, soul-thrilling and satisfying. I hope there are many others to follow like this and "The End of the Story".

Miss l'Anson, a promising young poet, was to see few of them. She died in 1932. Five of her poems appeared in *Weird Tales*.

Also in that issue, Mrs. Grace Penfield writes, from Toppenish, Washington:

One story in your April-May Issue has brought me the urge to write to you. It is "A Rendezvous in Averogne", by Clark Ashton Smith. To me the perfect weird tale must ring true, and must be weird to the nth degree. This story fills both bills. The writer tells a tale in such a manner that you feel it all the way through, and, having some of the good old Irish, banshee-believing blood in my veins, truth to tell he had me almost believing it. Even though he relates the end of the *Sieur du Malinbois* and his *chatelaine*, sure an' you'll never catch me in the wood of Averogne, at all, at all. I am looking forward to more by this author.

In the August 1931 issue, A. V. Pershing of Kenova, West Virginia, says, *inter alia*:

In addition I wish to say that I thoroughly appreciate all of Clark Ashton Smith's artistic word-pictures. His stories seem to be getting better and better and are surely a treat to those who like fine literature. There is one recent story by Mr. Smith that I will remember a long time to come, I am sure: namely the marvelous "The Uncharted Isle".

In the November issue Jack Darrow of Chicago (whom we've met as a director, three years later, of the Science Fiction League) says, commenting on the September issue, that

... for weirdness, "The Immeasurable Horror", by Clark Ashton Smith, takes the cake. It certainly is bizarre and unusual.

In the December 1931 issue, Duke Williamson of Springfield, Massachusetts, says of the September issue that

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5. Mrs. Sully had one other letter in "The Eyrie", this one in the January 1930 issue; not surprisingly, it also praises Smith. Here, we find her address given as Berkeley, California: "Several months ago I was much impressed with the story, 'The Ninth Skeleton', by Clark Ashton Smith, which appeared in your magazine. Your last issue prints a poem by the same author, 'Nyctalops', which is certainly one of the most original and haunting things I have read for a long time. A magazine which prints such high-class writing is deserving of praise, for most of the magazine poetry today is pretty poor stuff."

The most unusual tale is probably Smith's "Voyage to Sfanomoë". The story is exquisitely worded, written in a classic style of which the author is a master. In my opinion, it is fully competent to stand with his "The End of the Story", "Sadastor", and "The Last Incantation".

In the January 1932 issue there is what editor Wright calls "An interesting letter from a reader who signs himself 'Nimble Fingers'":

I have enjoyed your magazine immensely. Your stories are entirely different. There is one story in particular that I liked. Perhaps it appealed to me because I am also of that company of "good thieves and adventurers, in all such enterprises which require deft fingers and a habit of mind both agile and adroit." Perhaps you will think I am boasting, but I am not, as it doesn't pay to boast in this profession. By this time, no doubt, you will be wondering what story I am referring to: it is "The Tale of Satampra Zeiros". I have never read a story more entertaining and amusing than this one. What an adventure!

That story was, of course, in the November 1931 issue—and Wright did not need to be told its name, as he would recognise it instantly from the quoted words.

Also in the January 1932 issue, Donald Wandrei appears with the first of only two letters he ever had in "The Eyrie", saying:

Permit me to congratulate you on the recent Clark Ashton Smith stories, which are always poetic.

He goes on to praise "The Whisperer in Darkness" and Keller's "The Seeds of Death".

By the end of 1939, Smith had contributed fifty-five tales to *Weird Tales*, but only six of them—"The End of the Story", "A Rendezvous in Averroigne", "The Empire of the Necromancers", "The Colossus of Ylourgne", "The Death of Ilalotha", and "The Garden of Adompha"—were the absolute favourites of the writing-in readers. Five others—"The Monster of the Prophecy", "The Vaults of Yoh-Vombis", "The Dark Eidolon", "Vulthoom", and "Necromancy in Naat"—were first, "Vulthoom" sharing the honour with two other tales, and "The Dark Eidolon" with three.

"The Testament of Athammaus" (October 1932), "The Chain of Aforgomon" (December 1935), and "The Double Shadow" (February 1939) each gained second place, being defeated by, respectively, stories by Williamson, Howard, and Quinn.

Farnsworth Wright left *Weird Tales* early in 1940, and the results of the readers' voting were no longer given, so we don't know how the remaining seven tales published in the magazine fared in this respect.

The writer Robert Bloch, as I recall, stated many years ago that in the 'thirties the admirers of Lovecraft, as represented in "The Eyrie", and elsewhere, were notable more for their intensity than their numbers; and this seems to be true of the admirers of Smith also. He was probably a little saddened that stories into which he had put so much work failed to evoke the response that he felt they deserved. The occasional word of praise from a reader, and the few first-placings in the voting, would give him some crumbs of comfort—but we don't need to be too sorry for him, for he was fortunate in having any market for his stories: who would have wanted to buy them if there hadn't been a *Weird Tales*?

There does seem to have been the occasional protest from a reader about there not being more appreciation of Smith's work; in the July 1932 issue we find the following:

"Not having written you for several years," writes Mrs. G. W. Fisher, of Vineland, New Jersey, "I must voice my indignation, as after reading the May Eyrie, I find not one word of praise for the best story in the May [misprint for March] issue, Clark Ashton Smith's 'The Planet of the Dead'. Don't your readers appreciate him? Although his 'The Gorgon' in the April issue was fine and his 'Vaults of Yoh-Vombis' in the current issue even better, being a real blood-chiller and actually (is this treason?) surpassing Lovecraft in horror, 'The Planet of the Dead' seems to me to be one of his very best because of its remarkable vocabulary and beautifully colorful descriptions. . . ."

Also in this issue, after giving Hugh B. Cave's "The Brotherhood of Blood" his vote for first place in the May issue, Harold Dunbar, of Chatham, Massachusetts, says:

"Second place goes to 'The Vaults of Yoh-Vombis' by Clark Ashton Smith, which, though criminally padded with amateurish introspection and handicapped by a severe case of adjectivitis, was truly horrible, cruel, shuddery, original. . . ."

The same reader says in a letter published in the August issue:

"The final paragraph of Clark Ashton Smith's little story, 'The Weird of Avoosl Wuthoqquan' [in the June issue], should be classed among the few great climaxes of all time."

And in the January 1933 Issue there's a brief letter from Jack Williamson, writing from his home in New Mexico. After praising a cover painting by the artist St. John, and asking for reprints from early issues, he concludes by saying: "Let me also express my enjoyment of the peculiar fantastic humor in such of Clark Ashton Smith's stories as 'The Testament of Athammaus' [published in the October 1932 issue]."

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### **Startling Fact**

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[Reprinted from *The Fantasy Fan*, November 1933, pg. 38]

Many readers have asked the Editor where they could secure such books as the *Necronomicon*, *The Book of Eibon* and other books of medieval sorcery mentioned in the stories of Clark Ashton Smith, H. P. Lovecraft, and other authors of weird tales.

Upon these requests, the Editor wrote to Clark Ashton Smith, inquiring of him whether these books had been translated into English as yet or not, whereupon, Mr. Smith informs us as follows:

"*Necronomicon*, *Book of Eibon*, etc., I am sorry to say, are all fictitious. Lovecraft invented the first, I the second. Howard, I believe, fathered the German work on the Nameless Cults. It is really too bad that they don't exist as objective, bonafide compilations of the elder and darker Lore! I have been trying to remedy this, in some small measure, by cooking up a whole chapter of *Eibon*. It is still unfinished, and I am now entitling it 'The Coming of the White Worm' . . . This worm mentioned in *Eibon* is Rlim Shaikorth, and comes from beyond the pole on a strange, gigantic iceberg with a temperature of absolute zero."

We'll bet that most Smith and Lovecraft fans really believed in the existence of these books (as did the editor). A reader informs us that in the July issue of *Weird Tales*, these books were mentioned in three stories.

This incident only goes to prove that Smith and Lovecraft have the gift of creating the "illusion of reality," the phrase defined in the 1924 Anniversary Number of *Weird Tales*.

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### **Clark Ashton Smith's Column**

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#### **Unpopular Sayings**

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Truth, like a coin, has an obverse and a reverse side. One is a platitude, the other a paradox.

One cannot tell a woman's age by the frequency with which she looks in the mirror.

The famous principle of safety in numbers doesn't always work out that way. There may be destruction in numbers—if they all love you.

The true immoralist never tries to defend even his virtues.

The wrath of the witch-burners is in direct proportion to the comeliness of the witch.

There is no tyranny so oppressive as the tyranny of mobs.

Women who dress well are true artists: one might call them exterior decorators.

Lovers rush in where husbands fear to tread.

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## "The Weird Willys"

Excerpt from Chapter Four of *Ah, Sweet Idiocy*

By Francis T. Laney



*Francis T. Laney and Clark Ashton Smith*

... I had a definite date to meet Bob Hoffman and go meet Clark Ashton Smith on November 1 [1943].

A druggist fixed me up with some throat tablets which gradually brought me out of it, but I was a pretty sick lad for a couple of days. Aaron [Shearer, a friend of Duane Rimel's—Ed.] did most of the driving, though, and the easy stages of the next two days had me OK by October 30, when we laid over in the sun at Chico. John Cunningham was stationed there at the time, but we didn't bother—spending several hours looking through second hand stores and getting a number of very desirable records. Around sundown we finally arrived at Camp Beale, headquarters of RAHoffman and the 13th Armored Division.

Bob had reserved a room for us in the guest barracks; we had considerable difficulty locating both it and Hoffman, but finally made the grade. The three of us chatted for a while, then Aaron heard music coming from somewhere and went to investigate. Bob and I adjourned to his barracks, where my civvies brought me the biggest barrage of whistles and catcalls I ever had in my life. I managed to weather the storm, though, and soon found myself in the middle of a big conflagration with his cell-mates, all of whom went to great lengths telling me to stay out of the Army. In mid-evening, Bob recollected that he had prepared some Hoffmanla for *The Acolyte*, so we adjourned to the chaplain's office and spent nearly an hour looking at the crifanac Bob had been doing on Army time.

It being closing time at the Post Library, we went thither to meet one of the librarians, an attractive but plump girl whose name I no longer recall, but who had been subscribing to

*The Acolyte* with considerable interest and had been having big bull sessions of a fantastic nature with Rah. We collected her and walked through a big recreation hall where a dance was in progress. Struck by a certain familiarity in the solo guitar, I moved where I could see, and sure enough, his civvies sticking out like a sore thumb, there was my boy Aaron sitting in with a 15 piece GI swing band and having the time of his life.

Bob, the girl, and I went to the parlor of the visitors' barracks and spent the rest of the evening talking about fantasy, arguing about music, and generally conflagrating. In the course of all this, Bob and I perfected our plans to visit Clark Ashton Smith the next day, and the session closed on a high note of excitement.

We had to wait until noon the next day for Rah to clear himself with Uncle, but the time passed very quickly when we got to watching a bunch of tanks manoeuvring. The Weird Willys [a 1938 Willys sedan—Ed.] creaked and we moaned when Rah finally squeezed into the front seat with us, for he is what might well be described as a Plump Boy, and that tiny car was plenty full to start with—but the couple of hours drive to Auburn passed very quickly, despite a lousy road that knocked another couple of thousand miles off WW's life.

Smith lives a couple of miles out of town, and is at least a quarter of a mile from the nearest road. So we parked on the edge of a dirt cow-track, and started walking through what Hoffman insists is the fabulous Forest of Averogine, actually the remains of an orchard abandoned to the wilderness. Smith's cabin, a weather-beaten two room shack, sits well away from the trees in the midst of a rocky and desolate pasture. On approaching it, one is struck equally by its forlorn loneliness and by the beautifully built rock wall Smith has built around his dooryard.

I had of course heard a great deal about Clark Ashton Smith, and seen many pictures of him, but none of this had prepared me adequately for the man himself. He is tall and slender but well-made, and has a much more striking and massive head than his pictures indicate. On the occasion of our visit he wore dark slacks with a light sport coat and of course his omnipresent beret; trivial, perhaps, to mention the man's clothes, but it seemed vaguely incongruous to find the man who had written the sort of thing he has, dressed like any college student. And even more incongruous was it to discover, with a touch of pleased surprise, that the man I had thought of as aged and vibrant with a knowledge not of this world was instead as youthful as any of us. Smith is extremely shy at first, but as he gradually comes to feel that he is among friends who will not ridicule his mode of life and thought, he unbends, and becomes one of the most gracious hosts and entertaining conversationalists I have ever known.



Clark Ashton Smith, Francis T. Laney, and Rah Hoffman

We spent the afternoon drinking wine, talking, and being shown Smith's collection. His books, a choice and varied lot, including many surpassingly beautiful illustrated editions, are very much worth examining, but the real stab came from the surprisingly large quantity of artwork, mostly the creation of Smith himself. His sculptures, using the small boulders picked up in his yard, are somewhat known to fantasy lovers, several of them

having been shown on the dust jacket of *Lost Worlds* and in the illustrations in *Marginalia*. There were far more of them, however, than I had imagined—at least a hundred.

But the high point of the afternoon came when Smith brought out a stack of original drawings and paintings at least two feet thick. Perhaps 25 or 30 of them were commercially published ones, including the originals of most of Smith's drawings from *Weird Tales*, and the Finlay original from "The Thing on the Doorstep". (This last, incidentally,

is by far the best Finlay pen-and-ink I have ever seen. Made before Virgil started drawing to size, it measures something like two by three feet, and has a mellowed beauty encountered but rarely among magazine illustrations.) There were also several early Boks, including a couple of wonderful unpublished ones, and an unpublished Roy Hunt drawing of Tsathoggua.

Smith's own drawings and paintings, every one of them unpublished, made up the rest of the stack. Nothing of his that has been published gives any inkling of the man's stature as an artist. In technique, of course, he lacks a good deal, being entirely self-taught. But he more than makes up for it with subtle and bizarre ideas, by a surprisingly good sense of form and structure, and above all by his unconventional and often superlative use of color. Most of the paintings are done in showcard paint, or something very much like it; they tend to be garish, but yet there is a certain use of restraint that makes even the most unrestrained ones quite acceptable. Perhaps twenty show entities from the Cthulhu Mythos; the remainder are extraterrestrial landscapes, divided about equally between non-human architecture and alien plant life.

Of the conversation I no longer remember much.

Unforgettable, though, was Smith's impressive recitation of a medieval formula to raise the Devil. The afternoon was just guttering away into twilight, leaving the room in a hazy half darkness; between the look in Smith's pale eyes, the overtones in his voice, and his powerful delivery, I must admit that the chills were really going to town playing hide-and-seek along my backbone.

Materialist that I

am, I was actually relieved when Smith paused and remarked that he wouldn't repeat the spell a third time, for fear it would work! Then he laughed and the spell broke. But the man has dramatic powers which I believe might have made him famous as an actor had he followed that art.

With the onset of darkness, we went into town for dinner, taking Smith to a Chinese restaurant he had recommended. Our entry took on the air of a triumphal procession when we encountered the Auburnites, nearly all of whom greeted Smith warmly by name. It was pleasant to see that he is so well thought of by his fellow townsmen, a type of recognition not always given to creative artists.

Smith had a date at 8:00, so we left him downtown and headed the Weird Willys toward the Golden Gate. His parting sally was unforgettable. Aaron was riding high on a fresh fruit kick, and just as we were leaving he dashed into an open market and bought a large sack of grapes. Smith looked at him with an air of profound disbelief, turned to me and whispered, "That may be all right, but personally I prefer the finished product."

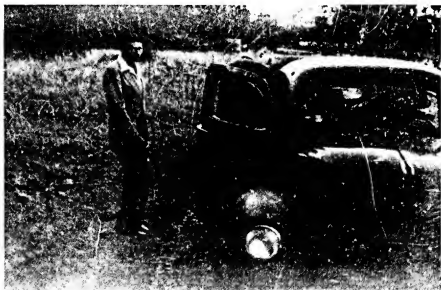


*Francis T. Laney and Clark Ashton Smith*





*Clark Ashton Smith and Francis T. Laney*



*Clark Ashton Smith, "caught in the act"*

## "Klarkash-Ton" Versus "Clark Ashton"

A Minor Issue for Controversy

By Rah Hoffman and Donald Sidney-Fryer

In the first of the two memoirs that he penned of Clark Ashton Smith, "As I Remember Klarkash-Ton" and "Memories of Klarkash-Ton" (collected in *The Black Book of Clark Ashton Smith*, Arkham House, 1979), George Haas indicated that "Klarkash-Ton" is pronounced simply as "Clark Ashton," that is, "klark-ASH-t'n." He probably intended well, but perhaps he understated the case. Smith's correspondent H. P. Lovecraft was wont to use fanciful or humorous nicknames in his letters, such as Comte d'Erlette for August Derleth, the Satrap Pharnabazus for *Weird Tales* editor Farnsworth Wright, Two-Gun Bob for Robert E. Howard, and even Éch-Pi-Ei for himself. The spellings of these whimsies were sometimes varied, and so the pronunciations themselves were subject to some variance. His name for CAS, Klarkash-Ton, suggesting an exotic, possibly even alien language—and entity—would seem to be pointless were it to be given vocal utterance in mundane everyday tones. How else to instill the essence of mystery into sound other than altering the spoken syllables? Thus KLAR-kash-TON', *ton* rhyming with *anon* or *salon*. Rah Hoffman and Donald Sidney-Fryer both recall that Clark, and his wife Carol as well, used this pronunciation, heavily accenting the last syllable, which seems to be the way that most Klarkash-Tonphiles and other aficionados utter the term. The o in TON would thus have the sound of o in such words as *not*, *odd*, *tonic*, or a string of proper names, such as *John*, *Don*, *Tron*, or even the sometime Presidential *Ron*!

Being an unusually gentle and nondogmatic individual, CAS, when pressed, did not insist on just one pronunciation for any of the names that he invented for persons and places in his prose fictions. The French-sounding names that he used or created for his Averroigne (AV-er-won) stories do not generally give many problems in pronunciation, especially to those familiar with the French language, even if only minimally. However, the names in his series of tales on Hyperborea, Poseldonis, Zothique, Xiccarph, etc., do provide readers with the opportunity for a variety of pronunciations. Similarly, he did not suggest that a person using HPL's term for Smith pronounce it as KLAR-kash-TON', even though it was the way Smith himself pronounced it.

Elsewhere, Rah Hoffman has written (in *Emperor of Dreams*, Donald M. Grant, Publisher, 1978) of some of Smith's speech patterns, such as pronouncing *imagery* accented on the second syllable. In general, CAS stated, his fictional names were accented on the penult (last but one) or antepenult (second before last) syllable, as frequently evidenced in the scanning rhythm of his story titles. *Atlantean* he accented on the penult (not the antepenult!), AT-lan-TE'-an, as later demonstrated in Sidney-Fryer's *Songs and Sonnets Atlantean* (Arkham House, 1971), a title which scans beautifully in the best Smithian manner. Zothique is pronounced Zo-THEEK', as revealed by Smith in verse. Other names include Tsa-THOG-u-a, Po-SEID-o-nis, A-VOOS-I Wu-THOQQ-uan. The word *eldorán*—not a Smith creation—is of course properly accented on the long o of its middle syllable. A few of Smith's story titles as he pronounced them: "A VOY-age to Sla-NOM-o-e"; "A Night in Malneant"—Mal-nay-ahnt, with a hint of a stress on the last syllable; "The Dis-INT-er-ment of VE-nus" (certainly not "The DIS-in-TER-ment OF Ve-NUS"!); The scanning is usually the proper clue.

And now, if someone will please come forth to pronounce for us the name of the reviewer for *Crypt of Cthulhu* and for this magazine—Stefan Dziemianowicz—perhaps we can all rest more easily!

## Sculptor's Work Will Be Shown Here Next Month



**CLARK  
ASHTON  
SMITH,**

sculptor who  
lives on the  
Auburn-Folsom  
road, was  
photographed  
by Geneva  
French of  
Crocker Art  
gallery staff,  
as he worked  
on a piece of  
native stone.



# Auburn Artist-Poet Utilizes Native Rock in Sculptures

[Reprinted from the *Sacramento Union*, 21 December 1941; reported by Eleanor Falt]

Sculpture from the native rock around Auburn is one of the arts to which Clark Ashton Smith devotes himself. Talc, soapstone, serpentine, sandstone, lava and various types of porphyry within a radius of 15 miles of his home are the materials he uses, many of them new to sculpture.

To lovers of poetry and devotees of weird and fantastic stories, Smith has long been known as one of the outstanding writers of the United States, though his taste for the exotic has, to a certain extent, cut him off from a large audience.

Smith was born in Long Valley, six miles from Auburn, January 13, 1893. His formal schooling consisted of a few years at the district school and completion of the grammar grades in Auburn. He refused to go to high school, wishing to pursue his own line of studies.

## **Sticks to California**

Surprising enough in view of the subject matter of his writing, painting and sculpture, he has not studied in Paris or New York. In fact, he has never been out of California, except for short trips to Nevada. His work has been shown in New York at the Salon des Independents, in San Francisco at Gumps, in Los Angeles and his work has been discussed in Paris art revues.

He lives on "Boulder Ridge," on a 39 acre ranch to which his parents moved in 1902. He has lived there ever since, with brief excursions into other parts of the state.

It is difficult to explain Smith's work in terms of his experience. And though a prodigious reader, he has not come under the influence of any philosophical system or religious idea sufficiently to account for the strange and sometimes macabre subject matter of his art and writing.

## **Ideas 'Just Come'**

When asked about the carving on his figure of "The Reptile Man," he says the idea just "came to him." Experts who have examined some of these sculptures

state that the hieroglyphics are an ancient language and are translatable.

Smith began to write at the age of 11, fairy tales principally. Edgar Allan Poe's influence on his writings has been apparent since he was 13. He says his first good poetry was written when he was 18, *The Star Treader and Other Poems*, published in book form. From that time on, he was a regular contributor to various poetry and story magazines of national circulation.

Emily J. Hamilton, a teacher in the Auburn high school, suggested about this time that he contact George Sterling in San Francisco. They became firm friends, Sterling helping Smith with the publication of his first book, reading the proofs and advising him. Of Sterling, Smith says: "He was essentially lovable, gave himself without stint and assisted scores of young poets." Smith doubts that Sterling's death was suicide, says that though he drank heavily and was in pain much of the time, he was eagerly awaiting a visit from H. L. Mencken when his death occurred.

## **Parents Sympathetic**

Smith's parents were sympathetic to his work though there is no record of artists or writers in either branch of the family. His father, Timeus Smith, born in England, was night clerk of the Hotel Truckee for many years. His mother was born in the middle west.

Smith's career has been interrupted numerous times by tuberculosis. He is enjoying good health at present and is planning a trip to New York under the aegis of Benjamin and Bio De Casseres, friends of many years standing.

He is in close contact with his fellow-fantacist, August Derleth and was a friend of H. P. Lovecraft, considered by many the greatest imaginative fiction writer since Poe. Vachel Lindsay began a correspondence with Smith after reading his poetry and the friendship lasted until Lindsay's death in 1937.

## **Crocker Display**

Smith will have 35 carvings and 20 paintings on display in Crocker gallery beginning January 1. He began his experiments in watercolors in 1916 and his sculpture, in 1935, quite by accident.

Visiting his uncle who owned a copper mine near Lincoln, he picked up a piece of talc, took it home, and casually carved it into a figure one day. Pleased by the result, since then, he has done more than 200 pieces.

Smith next sculpture will be a series of figures based on his own conception of the gods of classical mythology. His latest book, *The End of the Story*, will be issued by Arkham House next spring.

An interesting item that will be included in his Crocker show is a copy of his translations of Baudelaire included in the *Flowers of Evil* printed by the Limited Editions club of New York and illustrated by Jacob Epstein, famous London sculptor and artist.

## Letters From Auburn

Selected Correspondence to Robert H. Barlow

By Clark Ashton Smith

Auburn, Calif.  
Jun 16th, 1934

Dear Ar-Éch-Bel:

I have made up a package of drawings to loan you and will mail it the first of the week. I might have done this before—in fact, I *should* have sent you a number so that you could make your own choice. Perhaps you would have preferred something else to "Beyond Cathay". If you wish, you can make another selection. I am not setting prices on any of the drawings, since, in one sense, they are priceless; and, in selling them to a connoisseur, the tariff must be determined by what the aforesaid c. feels able to pay.

Your praise of "The Colossus of Yourgne" is heartening. Others have commended the tale, so I begin to think that perhaps I have under-estimated it. So far, I haven't found any ms. of this story and I am inclined to think that I burned the preliminary scraps and notes from which I worked it up on the machine. I have, however, the first carbon of "The Passing of Aphrodite" (a prose-poem) and shall send it on shortly. Also, I have located an item which you will like to have—the holograph of my continuation of the "3rd Episode of Vathek". I'll take another look for the H. E. [Hashish Eater] holograph. As to "The Disinterment of Venus", the copy held by Wright is the third or fourth revision of that pesky little opus. The cabin is littered with discarded versions of the damned thing. I'll see if I can find the original one. If there is an express office at De Land, I'll ship you a huge consignment of typescripts and holographs. First-rate postage is too much of an extortion, in my opinion. I resent such robbery more, if possible, than the U.S. tax on liquors! Express rates, on the other hand, are reasonable enough.

No, I haven't any proof-sheets of the 2nd *Rec'luse*, and doubt if any were made. Too bad Cook was unable to continue the venture.

Wright hasn't returned any of the originals of my W. T. drawings. I may or may not have mentioned that he recently presented me with about a dozen originals of illustrations done for my earlier stories by Senf, Nelson, Coolin and Wilcox. Some of them are better than the published reproductions: evidently the pulp paper is a chancy or mischancy medium for prints.

Hornig, it would seem, is possessed of various and versatile talents, especially in the journalistic line. I am not altogether surprised that he was able to furnish you with a hand-me-down pseudonym.

Re my drawings: Loveman, I would say, has by far the largest collection of them. God knows how many I gave him. He used to present me with whole shelves of books, and the drawings were the only return I could make. Wandrei purchased three or four of my landscapes. I don't believe that Long has anything, except, perhaps, a few of the grotesques. George Kirk, another of the "gang," bought 2 or 3 pictures when he visited me in 1920. Other purchasers include Bio De Casseres and a New York Russian Jew (friend of De Casseres) whose name temporarily eludes me. This Jew has several of the best landscapes, done about the same time as "Beyond Cathay".

Yes, I hope to continue *The Book of Eibon*. I am returning the "style-sheet" with such details regarding Tsathoggua as I am at present able to furnish. Some of these have required much delving into the *Parchments of Pnom* (Pnom was the chief Hyperborean genealogist as well as a noted prophet); and I am well aware that certain of my phonetic renderings from the Elder Script are debatable. You raise some interesting points with your questions. Azathoth, the primal nuclear chaos, reproduced of course only by fission; but its progeny, entering various outer

systems, often took on attributes of androgynism or bi-sexuality. The androgynes, curiously, required no coadjutancy in the production of offspring; but their children were commonly, though not always, either male or female. Thus you will note a progressive trend toward biological complexity. Hziulquoigmznzah, uncle of Tsathoggua, and Ghizghuth, T.'s father, were the male progeny of Cxaxukluth, the androgynous spawn of Azathoth. It is worthy of record, however, that Knygathin Zhaum, the half-breed Voormi, reverted to the most primitive ancestral characteristics following the stress of his numerous decapitations. I have yet to translate the dire and abominable legend telling how a certain doughty denizen of Commorlom (not Athammaus) returned to the city after its public evacuation, and found that it was peopled most execrably and innumably by the fissional spawn of Knygathin Zhaum, which retained no vestige of anything earthly.

Éch-Pi-El, I am sure, can furnish much fuller data concerning the genesis of Tulu. It would seem from the rather oblique references of Pnom, that Tulu was a cousin of Hziulquoigmznzah but was somewhat closer to the Azathothian archetype than Hz. The latter god, together with Ghizghuth, was born of Cxaxukluth in a dark distant system. Cx. then came *en famille* to Yuggoth, the family already including Ghizghuth's wife, Zstylzhemgni, and the infant Tsathoggua (Cx., I may add, has most mercifully continued to sojourn in the glacial night of Yuggoth). Hz., who found his parent slightly uncongenial owing to its cannibalistic habits, emigrated to Yaksh (Neptune) at an early age; but, wearying of the highly devout Yakshians, went on to Cykranosh, in which he preceded his nephew Tsathoggua. Ts. and his parents lingered in Yuggoth, having penetrated certain deep caverns beyond the Incursions of Cxaxukluth; but eventually Ts., leaving his parents behind, followed in the steps of Hz. Hz., a rather philosophic deity, was long worshipped by the quaint peoples of Cykranosh, but grew tired of their ex-votos even as of the Yakshians; and he had permanently retired from active life at the time of his encounter with Eibon as told in "The Door to Saturn". No doubt he still resides in the columned cavern, and still quenches his thirst at the lake of liquid metal. A confirmed bachelor, and *sans* offspring.

I have filled out your sketch of Ts.; and am returning it. My account of Ts.'s terrene advent can be reconciled with the references in "The Mound". Ts., through another dimension than the known three, *first entered* the Earth by means of the lightless inner gulf of N'kal and he lingered there for cycles. Later he established himself in caves nearer to the surface; and his cult thrived; but after the coming of the ice he returned to N'kal. Much of his legend was forgotten or misunderstood; and thus, through a mythopoetic variation, Gil'-Hathaa-Ynn came to tell the Spaniard Zamarcona that only the Images of Tsathoggua, and not the god himself, had emerged from the inner world.<sup>1</sup>

Well, I hope all this will clear up a few obscure points and prevent future contradictions. Of course, owing to the infernal difficulty of reading and transliterating the Elder Script, it may be that I am in error regarding some of the references; and I shall willingly submit myself to the correction of a superior scholar, such as Éch-Pi-El.

Yrs, in the faith of Hziulquoigmznzah,

Klarkash-Ton

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Auburn, Calif.  
Sept. 10th, 1934.

Dear Ar-Éch-Bei:

I fear you have thought me damnably remiss in regard to the letter which I promised you so long ago. But the truth is that my energy has been below par this summer, and the demands upon it have been increased sevenfold. I wrote practically no letters during August, and am now just beginning to resume the neglected epistolatory threads.

In a day or two, I shall return by express the muchly appreciated Argosy excerpts of "The Metal Monster" and "The Blind Spot", and shall enclose with them a few mss. and autograph items for your collection. I thought the M. M. a tremendous thing, but did not care half so much for the Hall-Flint opus. For one thing, there was too little differentiation of the people beyond The Blind Spot from humanity. However, as tales go, it is far from negligible. The mystery was admirably worked up in the first part.

As my card informed you, your offering for the drawings was quite *comme il faut*. I shall, needless to say, be very glad indeed to receive photos of the items retained. I was interested to note that you had decided on two—"The

1. This discussion of Smith and Lovecraft's invented mythology was prompted in part by Lovecraft's use of Smith's god Tsathoggua in his revision work, "The Mound". Portions of this discussion were printed in the Summer 1944 issue of *The Acolyte*, later reprinted in *Planets and Dimensions* (Mirage Press, 1973).

Witch's Tower" and "Lemurian Landscape"—which were particularly admired some years ago by F. B. Long, Jr. Malanath, concerning whom you inquire, is a master wizard from the world Pnidleethon, which revolves about Yamil Zacra, central sun of evil, and its dark companion, Yuzh.<sup>2</sup>

Your portraits of Cthulhu and Chaugnar certainly grow upon me with a baleful and arcane potency! Great stuff, and I hope that you'll do others, since it would seem that the bas-relief is particularly adapted to your talents. Thanks for the photo of C. L. Moore's remarkable drawing of Shambleau. I have been so doubtful of my ability toward bettering this from any angle, that I have not yet tried the pencil sketch that you suggested. Perhaps I'll have it to send in my next. C. L. Moore certainly must be a genius—I liked her "Dust of Gods" almost better than any of the tales so far published. My one objection is the omnipresent ray-gun, whose use seemed particularly unnecessary in this tale, since the dust could better have been ignited by some secret device installed aeons ago to protect it from desecration. Thanks too for giving me her address—I'd like to write her, but hesitate to do so at present because of my accumulated Ossa and Pellion of correspondence, to which I can hardly do justice.<sup>3</sup>

I'll now try to answer your questions, some of which have necessitated research into archives even darker and more obscure than those of the learned Pnom. Chushax, or Zishak, of whose lineage I can learn only the most meager and dubious details, was the wife of Tsathoggua. Their offspring, Zvilpoggua, was more male than anything else. The immediate parent of Cthulhu and his race (child of Nug) was Ptmāk. The parent of Yhoundeh or Y'houndeh was the androgyne animal Archetype Zyhūmé, which still abides in that cavern of the Archetypes which was visited by the ill-starred Ralibar Vooz on his compulsive itinerations through the Hyperborean underworld. Zyhūmé is a sort of nebulous and more or less spheroid elk. As to the marriage of Y'houndeh and the flute-player Nyarlathotep, I am inclined to suspect that something of the sort is hinted or adumbrated by Pnom. I quote the reference: "Houndeh in the 3rd cycle of her divinity was covered by that spawn which pipes perennially the dire music of chaos and corruption." If this doesn't refer to the Azathothian flute-player, I'll undertake to drink a straight gallon of the next *segur*-whiskey that is imported from Mars.

As to the people of your Annals,<sup>4</sup> I think that Yaksh is too bleak and boreal for them. I am inclined to believe that they must have lived on Antanōk, the lost, disrupted planet of which the asteroids are the remnants. This would account for their likeness to humanity, since, in earlier times, there seems to have been a little intercourse between Earth and Antanōk. In fact, there are certain forgotten authorities who claim that mankind as we now know it is descended from Antanōkan colonists.<sup>5</sup> Ulthar, as you have surmised, is indeed conterminous with both Averolgne and Poictesme, the latter lying somewhat to the northeast and the former to the southwest. As to Yondo, I have told that that country is situated many hundred leagues to the south of Dunsany's lands of Wonder.<sup>6</sup> Thus, you will readily perceive, it lies beyond all chartable regions of Earth without belonging to an alien planet.

My poetry column only ran for a year or two in the *Auburn Journal* and most of the items were reprinted in *Sandalwood*. I'll dig up some old clippings for you presently. The drama, *The Fugitives*, concerning which you inquire, was never written aside from a tentative beginning. I did write several songs for it, all of which were included in *Sandalwood*.<sup>7</sup>

Re the ownership of my sold paintings. I don't know just how many Bender has or did have, and imagine he has given them all to Mills College, a "high-toned" girls' seminary which he seems to favour. I doubt, though, if the number is more than 6 or seven. Bio DeCasseres and the Russian Jew, Sapanoff, might loan their pictures for photographing, and I'll try to find the present address of the DeCasseres so that you can write them about the matter. They have moved from their old address, 19 E. 31st St., N. Y. Wandrei has three or four paintings, and doubtless a few pencil sketches. Sterling didn't care greatly for my pictorial work but I once gave him an illustration in coloured inks which I had made for "A Wine of Wizardry". The picture took its text from the lines: "Silent ghouls Whose king hath digged a somber carcanet

2. A reference to the setting employed in Smith's "The Infernal Star" (1933), an unfinished novelette collected in *Strange Shadows* (Greenwood Press, 1989).

3. It may have been Moore who initiated a correspondence several years later (see the one surviving letter from Moore to Smith, dated 27 October 1937, John Hay Library, Brown University).

4. Barlow's fictional series, *Annals of the Jinns* (Necronomicon Press, 1978).

5. Here Smith is referring to the setting of his projected novelette, "The Master of Destruction" (1931) (see *Strange Shadows* for synopsis).

6. References here are to Lovecraft's "The Cats of Ulthar", James Branch Cabell's Poictesme novels, Smith's "The Abominations of Yondo", and Lord Dunsany's brief "Edge of the World" tales.

7. Fragmentary draft of this play is collected in *Strange Shadows*.

And necklaces with fevered opals wet." I have no idea what has happened to it.

I'd like to see the H. E. [Hashish Eater] when you finish binding it. Ye gods of Pegana, Mhu Thulan, Ulthar and Pnideethon! What an Idea! And I certainly look forward to the completion of *The Shunned House*.

Yrs for the finding of the Black Seal,

Klarkash-Ton

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Auburn, Calif.,  
July 5th, 1938.

Dear Bob:

Finally, though with some doubt as to their suitability for your purpose, I am mailing you a few of my smaller landscape paintings and drawings. Perhaps you have enough anyway, for the illustrating (or should one say illuminating?) of *Sandalwood*. I should have mailed these weeks ago; but, as usual, have suffered from the infernal dilatoriness consequent on several and sundry kinds of exhaustion. The crayon drawings are the most recent, having been done since I began my sculptures; and I am sending them along because they may interest you rather than with any idea to reproduction. I am also including, in a separate envelope, some of the photographs of aquarelles and drawings by John Allan which he has sent to me in folios of typed verse of his own composition. The verse does not quite show the technical mastery and imaginative genius of the pictures, though it is highly interesting, romantic and with many fine lines and phrases. I believe you will agree with me that the Italian monograph in appreciation of Allan's work (typed translation enclosed with the pictures) is thoroughly deserved and even somewhat moderately phrased. I copy hereunder the sonnet in which Allan describes "L'Evocation de Scorphael", which seems to be his supreme pictorial masterpiece:

The Spirit's profanation who would know:—  
Behold, eclipsed are heaven's last rays, that light  
Its sculptured fane, and in Cimmerian night  
It shall lie desolate, a Mystery of Woe;  
Archdemons of abandonment shall haunt  
Its holiest shrine; nor death nor dread shall daunt  
Their blood-wrought ritual, evoking so  
A strange creation, shaped in Heaven's despite.

Convened by Death, who knows no exorcism,  
Shall come the adepts of Abaddon and Baal,—  
Ecstatic! whose trance unlocks the Abyss;  
Then pale, resplendent, from the accursed travail,  
Shall crawl Hate's sublimates, Hell's fairest microcosm,—  
The Scorpion-seraph, demoness Scorphael!

Allan and his nephew, A. Scott (also an artist) were very appreciative of *Leaves*, and I believe you have heard from J. A. before now. I must remember to pay you for those numbers, and shall put aside for that purpose the next paper dollar that falls, flutters, or otherwise comes within reach of my Satampran digits.

I have recently enjoyed a visit from Claire P. Beck, who stopped here overnight on his way to Reno. His brother, as you doubtless know, will continue the printing press in Lakeport. The copy of HPL's notebook, which reached me the other day, seems a worthy job and rather attractively bound. As to *Sandalwood*, it seems to me that we should by all means retain the original title. Add the poem entitled "Sandalwood", and the fragment of *The Fugitives* if you like. As to *The Jasmine Girdle*, or other material from *Incantations*, it seems to me that there is no hurry whatever. Perhaps, with indefinite delay, I could do some special illustrations for these later and uncollected poems. Horace (or was it Virgil?) said that poetry should be kept for at least 9 years before publication. Personally, I feel like naming an astronomical figure for the period which most modern verse should be retained in cold storage.



Thanks for the photo of the beautiful Khmer head. This sort of thing makes most modern Occidental sculpture look like the Indian on a 5¢ piece.

I have done a little work (science fiction) but continue to loaf abominably. Thanks for the suggestion about historical fiction. This might offer possibilities but would require research. Egypt has been overworked; but there seem to be many fields of ancient history and archaeology that have been little touched in fiction.

I am glad your eye-trouble has been somewhat mitigated. John Allan, by the way, seems to have quite ruined his eyes by drawing and painting late at night and tells me he has had to give up art work. This is a tragedy. His best pictures, in my opinion, deserve a place beside the highest imaginative art of any land or time. Pictures such as "L'Evocation de Scorphael" and "The Sorceress" seem to render (as the art of no other artist quite does) the very essence of black magic and Satanry.

I am hoping to strengthen my own eyes (the left is the weakest) by persistent exercise and massage of the surrounding muscles; this being part of a general plan of physical improvement. I don't expect to become a Sandow or a John L. Sullivan; but believe that I can correct a few defects and ward off the encroachments of middle age. I spring from a tough and long-lived stock, and therefore should have some material to work on. My height is close to 5 feet eleven; weight at present somewhere around 140 lbs; chest measurement 37 inches; waist 30. I am neither phthisical nor obese by tendency, but should like to gain about 10 lbs of permanent muscle together with renewed nervous vitality and driving-power. The last five years have been hard on me, both emotionally and physically; and much of the time I have consumed habitually an amount of alcohol (some of it of rather poor quality) which most authorities on the subject would consider dangerous. Recently, for a while, I have abstained entirely; but find now that the continuance of a moderate amount of table wine is desirable.

Charles D. Hornig, of *Fantasy Fan* renown, expects to stop in Auburn this month on his way East from a vacation in Hollywood. I certainly look forward to seeing him. E. H. Price and his mother may run up during the summer, and perhaps bring with them a girl friend of mine whom I have corresponded with regularly, but have not seen, for more than twenty years.

As ever,  
Clark

P. S. Take your time about returning the pictures. No hurry whatever.

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### **Clark Ashton Smith's Column**

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#### ***The Devil's Note Book***

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All short circuits are dangerous: for example, avarice and self-love.

A woman is worth knowing, if she can run with the Four Hundred of a small town, and remain unspoiled by false ideals and false prejudices.

The ascetic and the sensualist are animated by the same illusion. One through denial, the other through indulgence, dreams that he can escape from himself.

Gin, chickens and jazz, is the latest version of the old Lutheran trinity.

The tertium quid often begins by being a coroner at the inquest of love, and ends by helping to provide a new corpse.

Platonic love: the air-plant in the garden of passion.

The most dangerous men are those who combine sentiment with sensuality.

For some, ennui is the synonym of life. The best one can do is to alternate the boredom of work with the boredom of idleness, the boredom of being in love with the boredom of not being in love.

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## Unpublished Revisions to "The Dimension of Chance"

In late July or early August 1932, *Wonder Stories* editor David Lasser suggested to Clark Ashton Smith that he compose a story involving the notion of "random atoms"; Smith complied by writing "The Dimension of Chance". The story was published in the November 1932 issue of the magazine and was later reprinted in Smith's collection *Other Dimensions* (1970). Prior to its magazine publication, however, Smith tried to insert two revised pages into the text. These revisions arrived too late for inclusion in the *Wonder Stories* appearance, and have never before been utilized. Smith felt that these "few revised pages" would have "improve[d] this yarn materially" (Smith to Derleth, 1 September 1932).

Smith's modifications consisted mainly of the revision of two paragraphs or paragraph-groups. We list below, side-by-side for comparison, both the original and revised texts for these two sections; page numbering refers to the *Other Dimensions* text. I cannot resist calling attention to the new emphasis on the emotion of loss/bewilderment/allenage—state of mind that represented almost a fixation for Smith.

In addition to these changes, Smith intended two further modifications: (1) he cut short paragraph 2 on p. 148, removing the explanatory sentences following (but not including) "Nothing, apparently was duplicated . . .", and (2) he deleted the flippancy "Lead on, MacDuff" from p. 149 paragraph 3. It should also be mentioned that, like all of Smith's work published in *Wonder Stories*, the editors tampered with Smith's paragraphing, frequently dividing a Smith paragraph into two. And lastly, Smith's division of the story into chapters was ignored. The following chapter divisions had been intended by Smith:

CHAPTER I:	The Blur in the Stratosphere (top of p. 141)
CHAPTER II:	The Valley of Mirages (before p. 144 para. 2)
CHAPTER III:	The People of Chance (before p. 150 para. 3)
CHAPTER IV:	The Pit of Dissolution (before p. 154 para. 3)
CHAPTER V:	The Masters of Chance (before p. 156 para. 3)

### [Original reading, p. 148 paragraphs 6 & 7]

"The late Professor Einstein would have been interested in this," remarked Morris. "Even the light must be moving at random, and sight images are traveling in zigzags and circles. Nothing is where it ought to be. We've gotten into a labyrinth of mirages."

"We'll be lucky if we ever find our way back to the old boat," snorted Markley. "Want to look any further for our Japanese friends?"

### [Original reading, p. 149 paragraphs 5 & 6]

"I guess we'll play tag with some more mirages," opined Markley in a disgusted tone. "Even if guns will shoot in this crazy world, there's small likelihood that we could hit anyone, or that anyone could hit us."

More deeply bewildered and bemused than ever, they pressed forward, trying to relocate the enemy vessel. The changing zones of gravity made their progress erratic and uncertain; and the landscape melted and shifted around them like the imagery of a kaleidoscope.

### [Revised reading]

Markley and Morris felt an indescribable confusion, a terrible and growing dubiety that involved the veraciousness of their own senses. Their very sanity was challenged by the labyrinth of impossible and illusory images into which they had wandered. For perhaps the first time in their lives, they knew the sensation of being utterly lost, in a boundless world of incertitude. Their habitual buoyancy and jauntiness began to evaporate, giving place to a furtive, unacknowledged terror.

"We'll be lucky if we ever find our way back to the plane," said Markley. "Want to look any further for the Japs?"

### [Revised reading]

"I guess we'll play tag with some more mirages," opined Markley in a tone whose ironic disgust was mingled with profound bewilderment and perturbation.

A nightmare confusion, a doubtfulness that implicated all things, even their own identity, returned and deepened upon them as they pressed forward, trying to relocate the enemy vessel. The changing zones of gravity made their progress erratic and uncertain; and the landscape melted and shifted around them like the imagery of a kaleidoscope. Like lost phantoms, they seemed to pursue a phantom foe through all the jumble and disorder of some incredible cosmic dementia.

## Review

STEVE BEHREND'S WITH DONALD SIDNEY-FRYER AND RAH HOFFMAN, EDs. *Strange Shadows: The Uncollected Fiction and Essays of Clark Ashton Smith*. Introduction by Robert Bloch. Contributions to the Study of Science Fiction and Fantasy, Number 36. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press (88 Post Road West, Westport, Conn. 06881), April 1989. xxiv, 283 pp. \$39.95 hc.

Reviewed by Stefan Dziemianowicz.

*Strange Shadows* is the perfect title for a book the editors describe as a collection of "the extant previously unpublished prose of the California author and poet, Clark Ashton Smith." Not only is it the actual title of a story that Smith completed in 1941, it also evocatively captures the spirit of the book's full contents. Most of these writings remained unpublished for a reason—they either were incomplete at the time of Smith's death in 1961, not up to his usual standards, non-fantasy that would have been difficult to place in his usual markets or not meant to be published in the first place. Thus, the items collected here represent something of Smith's literary shadow: they outline the dimensions of his imagination but at the same time leave its true features vague and undefined. The shadow metaphor is appropriate for another reason: In Smith's stories, shadows often acquire substance. Similarly, some of these "strange shadows" developed into completed, published works. Considered in this context, the shadows cast here shed light on the processes by which Smith created his art.

It's inevitable that *Strange Shadows* will be compared with *The Black Book*, Arkham House's 1979 transcription of Smith's commonplace book. However, the book's real counterparts, are *Marginalia*, *Something About Cats and Other Pieces and Dreams and Fancies*, the omnibus volumes of essays, letters, occasional jottings and notes that helped to flesh out the literary figure of H. P. Lovecraft. Admittedly, one will not learn as much about Clark Ashton Smith from these incidental writings as one learned about Lovecraft from his, but the sheer bulk of what is offered here—completed stories (5 entries), variant versions of published stories (3), fragmentary stories with accompanying synopses (14), synopses (97), non-fantastic fiction (8), prose poems and plays (12), miscellaneous and non-fiction prose (6) and appendices (including addenda to *The Black Book* and "The Lost Worlds of Clark Ashton Smith," a revision of Steve Behrends' invaluable "The Last Hieroglyphs: Smith's Lost or Unpublished Fiction" which originally appeared in *Crypt of Cthulhu* #26)—yields a considerable number of insights.

We could begin at the beginning, with the section of "Completed Stories." Smith finished the first of these, "A Good Embalmer," on February 7, 1931, and wrote to August Derleth, "It is not in my natural genre, and may not even have the dubious merit of being salable." He was right on both counts. The story of a dead undertaker who revives long enough to scare to death another undertaker whom he vowed would never embalm his corpse, "A Good Embalmer" reads like the scenario for an E. C. Comics feature. How surprising, then, to find that Smith completed this tale less than a month after his memorable "City of the Singing Flame" and at the same time he was finishing a tale of Hyperborea ("The Testament of Athammaus") and creating the world of Zothique (in the fragment "A Tale of Gnydron"). Smith's imagination may have soared like a skylark, but tales like "A Good Embalmer" show that it had to touch the earth (if not the earthy) every now and then.

"Strange Shadows" (retitled "I Am Your Shadow" by the final draft), another of the completed stories, is interesting for what it says about Smith's ability (or inability) to size up a market. Smith began writing the story in 1940, in the midst of his creative lull, with the idea of selling it to John W. Campbell's *Unknown*. A quaint tongue-in-cheek fantasy, "Strange Shadows" is a little reminiscent of Howard Wandrei's "The Hexer" and Henry Kuttner's "The Misguided Halo" (both of which had already appeared in *Unknown*). One can only wonder how different Smith's future would have been had he cracked Campbell's magazine and found an outlet for his droll sense of humor. However, the tale exists in three drafts, and successive reworkings of the material show Smith drifting further and further from the type of story Campbell would have bought and closer to something that might have been appropriate for *Weird Tales*. This only confirms the suspicion borne out by Smith's publishing history: in his heart, he was and always would be a *Weird Tales* author.

The remaining completed stories are a grab bag. "Double Cosmos," finished in 1940, is Smith's reworking of the parable of Lao Tzu and the butterfly. During an experiment to stimulate his sixth-sense, a scientist encounters an extra-dimensional creature who informs him that he is only one of that creature's vestigial organs. Smith leaves the end of the story tantalizingly open, with the scientist uncertain whether the creature tells the truth or is just a figment of his imagination. "Nemesis of the Unfinished," a collaboration with Don Carter, is less interesting as a story than for its central image: a writer who finds it difficult to complete stories is likened to a sorcerer who calls up demons he cannot control. "The Dart of Rasasfa," Smith's last complete work of fiction, is poor, and for obvious reasons: he wrote it to accompany a George Barr cover for the April 1962 issue of *Fantastic Stories*. The idea of Smith taking his

inspiration from a pre-fabricated image (Barr's skill as an illustrator notwithstanding) is not quite as foolish as his trying to incorporate editorial "improvements" requested by someone like Hugo Gernsback, but the results are about the same. The editors have included the rough description Smith made of Barr's painting and one can see that he didn't so much flesh this draft out as add sentences to it. This was one of the few times a fantasy magazine's rejection of a Smith story was justified.

We'll never know how much of the material in *Strange Shadows* remained unpublished, incomplete or undeveloped because of Smith's frustration with editors insensitive to his craft, but the section "Variant Versions of Published Stories" contains at least two more stories that could have been added to that chronicle of editorial ineptitudes, Necronomicon Press's "The Unexpurgated Clark Ashton Smith" series. Anyone who has read Smith's "The Beast of Averogne" in *Lost Worlds* no doubt found it a mildly interesting, if routine, horror story. Comparing it to the original version of the story printed here, I find aesthetic grounds for considering it a butchery as bad as any other committed on Smith's work. Smith's original version was presented as the interlocking stories of three narrators: the monk who first discovers the beast, the abbot whose monastery is beset by the beast, and the nobleman who finally slays the beast. "The documentary mode of presentation may have led me into more archaism than was palatable," Smith wrote to Derleth when the story was rejected by *Weird Tales*, and so he pruned it by 1400 words and rewrote it as the sole narrative of the nobleman. In doing so, he sacrificed the surprises built into the original narrative scheme—the successive discoveries that the monk has been slain by the beast, and that the abbot actually is the beast. Gone, too, are the different points of view that allow the reader to identify with the characters. Smith was not good at creating memorable human personalities in his stories, but his Averogne tales were notable for their portrayal of a time and place in which humans are at the mercy of their own frailty and ignorance as much as the supernatural. By resorting to the omniscient hero's point of view, Smith undermined the story's sense of human limitation, rendering the horror less horrible and his characters' fears less poignant. In time, self-editing to satisfy the demands of the marketplace must have become a reflex reaction for Smith. The draft of "The Coming of the White Worm" published here flows more smoothly than the version that appeared in 1941 in *Stirring Science Stories*, but it was full of archaisms (which often were crucial to the tone Smith hoped to achieve in a work) and Smith took it upon himself to edit many of them out of his final copy.

Faced constantly with the prospect that a whole month's work might go for nought owing to the whims of a particular editor, it's a wonder Smith didn't throw in the towel and try writing mainstream fiction. If the "Non-Fantastic Fiction" section of the book is any indication of what Smith was capable of producing when he cured himself of adjectivitis and stood with both feet planted firmly on Earth, we can be thankful he didn't. In all fairness, these stories read like they were written with the sappy love pulps in mind as possible markets: they're full of stereotyped characters, empty situations and grating clichés. Only "Eviction by Night" (included with the fantasies in the "Fragmentary Stories" section), a fragment of Steinbeckian realism based on Smith's experiences as a farm laborer, gives any indication that he could have produced something of note outside of the fantasy field.

One could write quite a long review of this book were one to address its every point of interest. What's important to know is that every section of *Strange Shadows* contains some item worthy of future study by Smith scholars. The longest of the "Fragmentary Stories," the 10,000-word "The infernal Star" (1933), is riddled with references to Smith's different story cycles as well as to the Lovecraft Mythos. Had Smith completed it, it might have served the same collating function for the Clark Ashton Smiths that "The Whisperer in Darkness" served for the Lovecraft Mythos. Readers who have Smith's collected stories will certainly want to compare them to their corresponding "Synopses" to see how faithful they are to one another. Stories like "The Light from Beyond" and "The Nameless Offspring" (just to give two examples) depart significantly from Smith's initial conceptions. Sadly, synopses like "The Rebirth of the Flame" (the third story in Smith's "Singing Flame" series, and one that showed greater promise than the second) were never developed into full-fledged works. In the "Prose Poems and Plays" section, the standout is "The Dead Will Cuckold You," a verse drama with much more to offer than its weird menace pulp title might suggest. Without a doubt, the most intriguing section of *Strange Shadows* is "Fantastic Titles." This is a list of several hundred potential story titles that Smith jotted down between 1929 and 1930. Since not all of them can be matched to a story or a synopsis, one can only assume that Smith was attracted to the way they sounded, as much as to any idea behind them. The thought of Smith writing a story to go with an alluring title, rather than vice versa, somehow seems perfectly in character.

It would be wrong to give the impression that *Strange Shadows* is the sort of book one reads at one sitting. It is a reference book meant to be dipped into on occasion, and in many instances only after one has read work by Smith published elsewhere. That one can do so with such ease is a tribute to the editors, and in particular to Steve Behrends. The editorial care Behrends has demonstrated in Necronomicon Press editions of Smith's writings is on full display

here. We have him to thank not only for transcriptions of Smith's writings and restoration of his early drafts, but in the case of the fragment "Mnemoka" for actual reconstruction of the damaged manuscript. Behrends' 15 pages of notes and annotations are masterpieces of scholarly compression that condense an enormous amount of information into a convenient, usable form. They also show a familiarity with Smith's work that extends beyond simple knowledge of chronologies to an actual sympathy with Smith's aesthetic goals and philosophies. Because of his enthusiasm and determination, *Strange Shadows* is easily the best edited book of Clark Ashton Smith's work published yet.

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